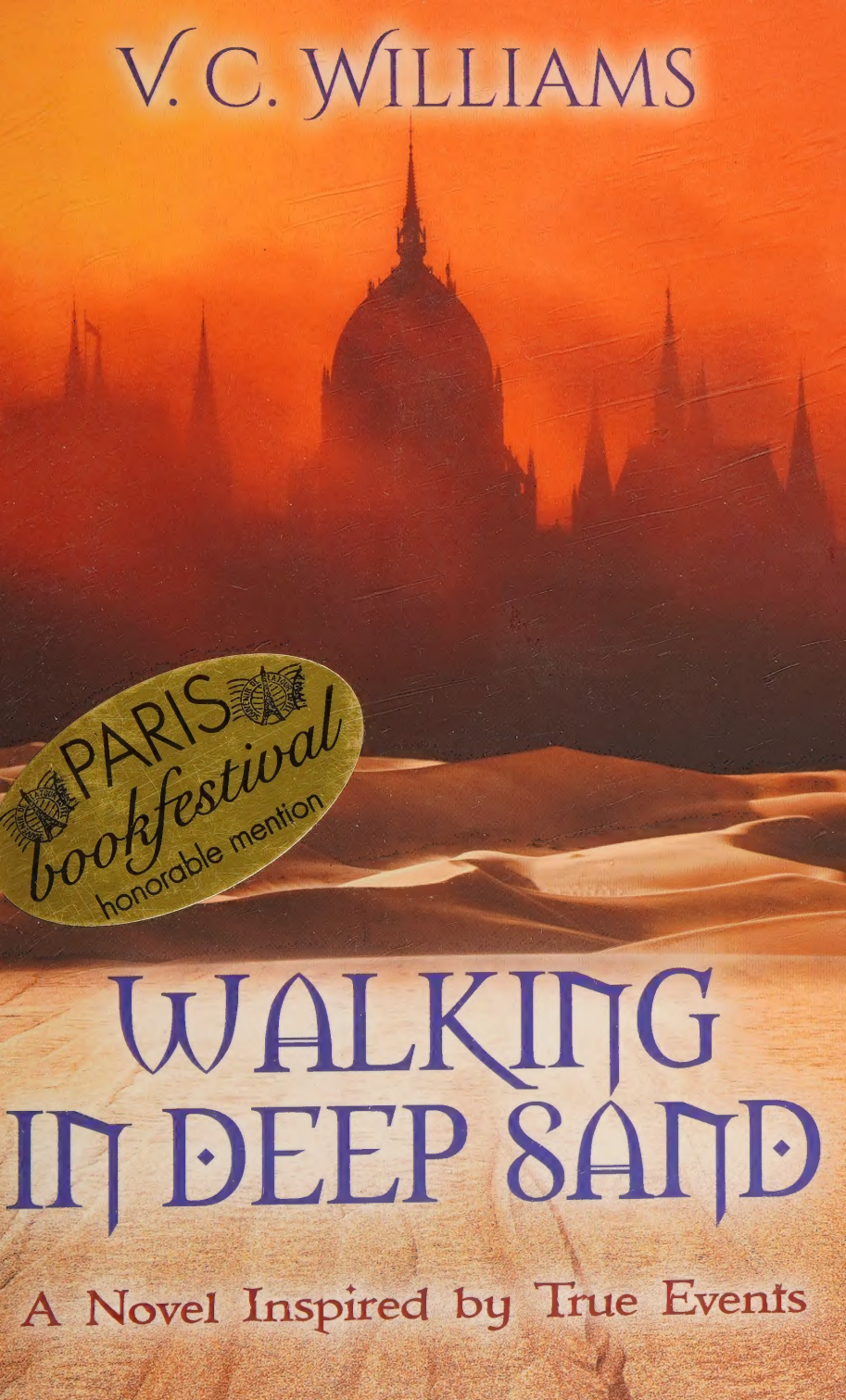
V. C. WILLIAMS



WALKING IN DEEP SAND

A Novel Inspired by True Events

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This is a work of fiction inspired by true events. Sections regarding family life in the US Foreign Service in SE Asia and Northern Africa during the 1950s and 1960s are, in general, typical of the era. In certain cases, characters, incidents, and timelines have been changed for dramatic purposes. Other incidents and events are wholly the imagination of the author. Characters may be composites or entirely fictitious.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this novel to my awesome husband, whose support and knowledge have been invaluable to me. He willingly listened to my ideas, offered insights, and encouraged me every step of the way. This book couldn't have happened without him.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to offer my thanks and express my heartfelt gratitude to my husband and to our friends Jerry and Beverly Ginnelly who shared their experiences and memories of life in the US Foreign Service in the 1950s and 60s. Beverly was especially helpful in explaining the unique day-to-day routines and responsibilities of women who willingly gave so much of themselves while serving alongside their husbands.

UN

"The biggest adventure you can ever take is to live the life of your dreams." Oprah Winfrey

I. Kansas City. June 1949

"Mother, let me do that!" Cynthia reached across the bed and grabbed a blouse from her mother's hands. "It must be folded with as few creases as possible." Cynthia carefully refolded the blouse and gently placed it inside the trunk sitting on the floor at her feet. "I don't want to arrive and find all my clothes wadded up into a big mess!"

"I'm just trying to help, dear. You have so much to do before you sail and…"

"Never mind, Mother. I can take care of all this." She looked around at the pile of clothing laying on the canopied bed. "Mother, where is my cardigan, you know the blue one with the embroidery on the collar?"

"I'm not sure, dear. It must be in your closet." Cynthia looked at her mother, a plump, middle-aged woman dressed in a shapeless housedress, with fine brown hair styled in the old-fashioned look of the war years: side hair swept back from her face into a tight sausage roll pinned at the back. Her mother's classic features might be pretty if she hadn't let herself go. She was barely forty but looked much older.

"No, Mother! I gave it to you yesterday. You were going to sew a button back on it, remember?"

Her mother's hands flew to her face. "Gracious, I completely forgot. I'll do it right now. You'll have it in a jiffy." She scampered out of the small bedroom.

Cynthia shook her head in disgust. "I knew it," Cynthia muttered to herself. "Can't rely on her for anything. I'll probably have to sew it on myself."

As Cynthia continued with her packing, her father entered her room and stood just inside the doorway. A tall, lanky man with graying sandy hair, he looked around at the chaos in the room. "Remember when we painted and papered this room together, Cindy? I remember that you were so picky about the colors and the wallpaper pattern. But we had fun. Remember?"

"Please don't call me Cindy!" She looked at him closely to see if he'd been drinking. Her father had always liked his whisky, but lately, he'd taken to drinking earlier and earlier in the day. He seemed sober enough for now. She huffed with impatience and said, "Of course, I remember. I also remember this room was painted a sick-looking pink with pink and yellow striped wallpaper. I felt like I was in a circus tent. And those yellow ruffly curtains and canopy were awful. I guess it was fine when I was six, but I never liked it. I don't know what Mother was thinking."

"Cynthia! That's so unkind! She meant well." Her father's face took on a pained look.

Cynthia looked at the white and pale lavender fitted canopy and the white-trimmed lavender classic drapery at the window. The walls above the chair rail were papered in a subtle green and lavender sprigged pattern. She remembered the argument when she insisted on a matching bedspread and the fitted canopy. Her father said everything was too expensive. She looked at that bedspread now and smiled.

"I also remember how you installed this chair rail. You did a good job, Dad." She had painted it white, finishing up with lavender painted below the chair rail. For a fourteen-year-old, Cynthia thought she had done a good job. She looked around and said, "I still love this room. I'll miss it."

"Don't sound so final, Cind...Cynthia. You won't be gone forever. The study program is what... eighteen, twenty months? You'll be back home before you know it."

Cynthia ignored his comment and said, "Will you hand me that small suitcase there by the closet?"

He picked up the suitcase and said, "I never thought when your mother and I picked out this three-piece luggage set for your high school graduation present that you'd be taking them to France."

Cynthia looked up at him briefly and asked, "Is everything all set with my travel money?"

"Yes, I called the attorney a few days ago and he confirmed that the trust your grandmother left you last year can be used for your education and related expenses. I have what you need to get over to France and for your tuition at that place in Grenoble. The travel arrangements are all taken care of. You know, you could show some gratitude for what your grandmother did for you."

Cynthia replied, "Didn't I tell you it would work out? Just because I don't get my money until I'm twenty-one doesn't mean I can't use some of it for my college education in the meantime."

"Don't forget, young lady, that I'm trustee and I'm responsible for that money for the next two years. I'm not going to hand over whatever you want anytime you say." She didn't respond. "I still think this whole thing is a mistake."

"Why?" Cynthia laughed as she turned to look at her father. "I'm nineteen. Remember, when mother was my age, she was already married. And it's not like I've never been away from home. That school you and Mother sent me to in Quebec for four years was so much fun," she sneered. "Being cloistered with a bunch of old nuns was a fabulous education. I hated it, especially those insipid girls whose one ambition in life was to get married as soon as possible."

"Don't be disrespectful! I'm sorry you didn't make any friends, but you learned French, didn't you?"

Cynthia picked up a pair of black leather pumps, slid them into a cloth bag, and tucked them into a corner of the suitcase. "Yes, I suppose I can be grateful for that, and Quebec is a lovely French

city… when I could see it, that is. The nuns didn't let us out of our cells that often and certainly not without a chaperone."

"Your mother and I feel you would be better off if you went to college here in the states and found a good man to marry instead of cavorting off to France and who knows what." Her father scowled as he put his hands in his pants pockets.

She turned to look at him. "You must be joking! I'm not going to waste my time at some jerkwater college with a bunch of Kansas City hicks. This is serious to me, Dad. I'm going to the university in Grenoble and that's final!" She turned back to her packing. "And I don't want to get married. I want to do more with my life than just being a housewife and having babies."

"There's nothing wrong with that, Cynthia. What makes you so high and mighty, anyway? And what have you done with your hair? It's so pretty when you wear it down."

"It's what they call a chignon. Don't you like it?" Cynthia smiled as she patted the sleek coil at the nape of her long neck.

"I don't care what they call it, it's too old for you." He sighed. "Cynthia, you're going to find out one day that life has a lot of ups and downs. It can be hard and disappointing. Dreams don't come true without a lot of hard work and a lot of luck." He sighed again. "And maybe not even then."

Cynthia's look softened. "Well, I'm sorry your life didn't turn out so well, Dad, but I know what I want." She quickly turned away before she lost her determination. "Nothing is going to stop me from getting it! When I'm finished at Grenoble, I'll be 21 and I'm taking my money and moving to Paris to get a job there." She turned back to face her father who was staring at her as if he didn't know her. "Not just any job, either, but a career! I'm going to work at someplace prestigious, maybe even NATO." Her father's eyebrows shot up. "I'm going to do something important with important people. Just you watch!" Cynthia turned away and resumed her packing.

Her father looked at her standing over her half-filled trunk, confident and excited, and he suddenly felt sad and old. He sighed and said, "I guess we need to talk about your allowance sometime."

"Later, Dad. I've got to get this trunk packed. Remember, you need to take it to the shipping office tomorrow so it will arrive in Grenoble by the time I get there." She turned to face him, smiled, and said, "I do have some ideas about my allowance. I've made some notes. We'll talk after dinner, huh?" She turned back again to her packing thinking that by the time he'd had a few cocktails, her dad might agree to anything.

Her father looked at her a minute, sighed again, and walked out of the room.

"Tell Mother I need my cardigan! Now!" she yelled after him.

DUEX

"It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife." Jane Austen

II. Grenoble France, August 1949

She felt eyes on her and quickly glanced up. The young man immediately looked down. He was standing at one of the tables in the student's registration hall, a high-ceilinged room where voices echoed among the ancient columns, marbled floors, and room-sized paintings. He was assisting a student who was filling out the required paperwork for entry into the university in Grenoble.

It was obvious the man was an American, mainly because of his bad French. When she heard him mangle a phrase, she glanced up again and saw him looking at her. This time their eyes met, and he smiled. She shook her head and went back to her paperwork. She had to admit he was attractive. He didn't seem to be very tall, maybe 5'9" or so, of slight build, but broad through the shoulders. He had a rakish look, with gray eyes, dark, wavy hair, and a smile that ticked up at one corner. Maybe he was one of those arrogant young men she'd heard about, who think they can just smile and get any woman they please. He certainly gave the impression of confidence. But she wasn't interested. She had plans.

Certain that he was watching her, she self-consciously ran her

hand over her lap, smoothing her skirt. She uncrossed her long legs and tucked her feet underneath her chair, crossing them at the ankle, like the nuns taught her, and tried to ignore him. She had no idea how striking her looks were. She wasn't beautiful in the typical Hollywood style, but with a subtle quality that drew attention. She was slender, and her golden-brown hair was smoothed back from her oval face into a classic chignon with a short curl escaping from her brow. Her eyes were a startling blue, large and almond-shaped. She gave an appearance of serene elegance.

She forced herself to think about why she was here. Although she had never been to France before, after spending four years in Quebec, she was a confirmed Francophile. She was also determined to be completely independent. She didn't want anyone telling her how to live her life. To have a stimulating career living in France would be the ultimate adventure! Here at the university, she would improve her reading, writing, and translation skills, take some international business courses and then move to Paris!

Her thoughts turned to the handsome young man and she glanced his way. His head was bent over the other student, explaining something in the paperwork. He had a calm, mature demeanor about him. Was he a student? She didn't think he worked here. His French was too awful. Why was he here?

Suddenly he walked over. He bowed slightly, and in what was probably his best French, he haltingly spoke, "Bonjour, mademoiselle. Comment ca va? Je suis Geoffrey Stuart from l'Amerique." He looked into her eyes, smiling.

Cynthia smothered the urge to laugh. His accent was atrocious. His grammar could use some work, too. She responded kindly, her French impeccable. "Bonjour, Monsieur. Ah, êtes-vous d'Amérique? Quelle état?" She smiled and extended her hand. This was fun. He grasped her hand and shook it once. Cynthia noticed he failed to kiss her hand, according to custom.

He took a breath as if trying to figure out what to say. "Est ce que vou… connair les Etas Unis? Je suis… pour Virginia. Et quelle et votre nom?"

She switched to English. "Yes, I am quite familiar with

Virginia and my name is Cynthia Jones." She laughed out loud at his incredulous look. "I am also from America, Kansas City, to be exact, by way of Quebec." He smiled broadly with relief and they both laughed.

Geoffrey asked if he could sit down at her table and, without waiting for an answer, quickly made himself at home. Cynthia, noticing the southern drawl, was unaccustomed to such behavior and was a little uncomfortable. But Geoff's polite, friendly manner soon put her at ease.

"Do you work here? I saw you helping that student." Cynthia asked.

"Oh no, I'm a student, too. I just graduated from college in Virginia after service in the Navy during the war, so I guess I'm a little older than some of the others."

"What did you major in? And why are you here now?" Cynthia was intrigued.

"I graduated with a double major in Economics and Foreign Affairs." Cynthia's eyes lit up with interest. He continued, "You heard how horrible my French is. I plan to enter the US Foreign Service with a posting to a French-speaking country, so I need to improve my French."

"The Foreign Service! That is so fascinating!" Cynthia exclaimed.

Geoff smiled and asked, "Yes, well…What about you? Why are you here?"

"Oh, I just love France, at least what I've seen so far. And I want to live here! I'm sure you know that the university is famous for its international studies programs. After I finish here, I'm hoping to move to Paris and a get job, maybe with NATO." Cynthia's eyes sparkled with excitement.

He smiled and responded, "My, that is quite ambitious for a young lady from Kansas City!" Cynthia frowned at the obvious condescension. Not noticing, Geoff drawled, "But the way you speak French I'm sure you'll have no trouble at all."

She smiled and said, "Well, it looks that we both have exciting futures with French!" She stood up and gathered her things to leave. Geoff stood up immediately, too.

"You don't have to go now, do you?"

"Yes, I still have some unpacking to do. It was a pleasure meeting you, Mr. Stuart." She extended her hand.

Geoff took her hand with both his and said, "The pleasure is all mine! I'm sure we'll meet again soon. The Universite Grenoble-Alpes has been here for centuries but it's known for its intimate quality. And please, call me Geoff."

They stood there a moment looking at each other before Cynthia, looking down, gently pulled her hand away as she said, "Until then, Geoff, au revoir, a bientot." She looked up briefly, then gathered up her paperwork and her purse and without another glance walked quickly to the registrar's desk, dropped off her paperwork, and after a brief exchange with the registrar, left the room.

Geoff stood still, staring after her.

TROIS

"Your hearing is just fine. It's your listening that seems to be the problem." Julie Johnson

III. Grenoble. Fall 1949

As time went by Geoff actively pursued her; he showered her with attention and affection. He planned picnics at the elegant Jardin de Ville, with its spacious grassy areas, wooded walkways, and abundant flowers, all within easy walking distance of the University. They enjoyed twilight strolls in Grenoble's main town square, the Place Grenette, with its historic houses, elegant restaurants, and intimate cafes.

"This is such a lovely place, isn't it, Geoff?" Cynthia and Geoff sat at an outdoor café, enjoying a glass of mulled wine and some freshly baked bread. Cynthia tilted her head toward the sky as the moon rose over the snow-covered Alps to the East. The smells of the nearby restaurants as well as the woodsy, musky fragrance of the last of the fall flowers permeated the air. She loved the pungent, strong coffees and the unmistakable smokiness of rotisserie meats. Over it all was the ashy smell of cigarette smoke. It seemed to Cynthia that she and Geoff were the only ones without a cigarette in their hand.

"Are you warm enough, Cynthia? It's turned a little chilly, hasn't it?" Geoff reached across the little table and pulled

Cynthia's woolen scarf up around her neck.

"Oh, I'm fine, Geoff." Dragging the scarf back down to her shoulders, she snapped, "Thank you, but I'm perfectly comfortable." Seeing his face, she quickly pivoted. "Oh, look Geoff, someone must be roasting chestnuts over there." She pointed across the square to where a vendor had set up a small grill with a couple of large, metal pans into which was placed a quantity of the nuts. "I used to get them in Quebec. I love them in cold weather. Have you ever had any?"

"No, I haven't. But I'd love to try some." Geoff smiled at her enthusiasm.

"When we finish our wine, shall we go over and buy some chestnuts?" Geoff agreed. Cynthia had noticed that he generally went along with whatever she wanted to do. "Maybe we can get some more wine, too, OK?"

One Saturday morning, Geoff met Cynthia in the small courtyard in front of the women's hostel where she lived. He had two bicycles.

"My goodness, Geoff! How did you get those two bicycles over here by yourself?"

"I got one of my roommates to ride one over here with me. And before you ask, yes, he's fine with walking back." Geoff laughed.

"Well, this is a treat! I haven't ridden a bike since I was twelve. I hope I still remember how." She looked at the bicycles. Each had a basket up front and each was loaded with goodies of some kind. She looked up at the cloudless, blue sky and the trees with their leaves just beginning to turn shades of gold and red. The snowy Alps showed brilliantly in the warming sun. "It's a beautiful day for a ride and a picnic, but I think I need to change out of this skirt into something a little more appropriate. I want to get my Brownie camera, too. I'll be back in a few minutes."

Geoff had researched the many historic paths throughout Grenoble, and he enjoyed guiding Cynthia on their journey. They rode through the old city and crossed the winding Isere River and headed northeast. When they reached the fabulous Jardin des

Dauphines under the historic Bastille, they parked their bikes near the Porte de France and hiked up to the large garden laid out amid the old fortifications high above the city. Walking paths wound through trees, flowering plants, and an equestrian statue of Philis de La Charce, known as the Joan of Arc of the Dauphine. They paused at lookout points and took pictures of the city below where the Drac and Isere Rivers glimmered like ribbons thrown out through the heart of the old city.

"Geoff, I have to say I am absolutely dazzled by this lovely garden. Thank you for bringing me here."

Geoff smiled. "I read about this place. The entire garden was planted in honor of the royal Dauphins. The fortifications, the old Bastille, was built during the 16th century. See that stone tower over there? That was part of the old fort."

"This is so fantastic, Geoff! To think that Cynthia Jones, born in Oklahoma, is sitting in a place so rich in history. The States have so little in comparison. It's hard to take in."

Geoff exclaimed, "You were born in Oklahoma? So was I!"

"Isn't that a coincidence! Just think, Geoff, how crazy it is that two Okies like us could meet in a place like this."

"I don't think it's crazy at all." Geoff reached for her hand and gazed into her eyes. "It was meant to be."

"Don't be silly, Geoff. You can be such a flirt. I just bet the girls you met in Hawaii and Singapore all thought you were a real ladies' man."

He smiled and shook his head. "Not exactly. Now, I admit I may have done my share of flirting in the past, but you're different from anyone I've ever met."

"Yes, I'll just bet." Cynthia laughed and turned her head to take in the view.

QUATRE

"Ambition is like love, impatient both of delays and rivals." Buddha

IV. Grenoble. October 1950

Whatever Geoff really thought of Cynthia, it didn't matter much to her. She only cared that they got along and enjoyed many of the same things. Exploring with an agreeable person was always more fun than being alone.

Cynthia was fascinated by the history that surrounded them and loved being in the outdoors. Like Geoff, she was naturally athletic and had no trouble keeping up with him. They skied in the winter and rode their bikes everywhere in the spring and summer. He was a good sport when she teased him about his French, and she was fascinated with his tales of exotic Pacific locales during the last months of the war.

"I've been to so few places. I guess you saw a lot when you were in the Pacific. How exciting that must have been, being the captain of your own ship!"

"Well, it was not a large boat, just an LST, you know, a Landing Ship Tank."

"Oh, I saw pictures in *Life Magazine* of LSTs landing troops on the Pacific islands during the war. It must have been incredibly dangerous with all the gunfire."

"Ah…yes, it was. But the war in the Pacific was pretty much over by the time I got my orders. I spent most of my time running all over the place trying to catch up with my LST."

"Oh, so you didn't see any action? You must have been disappointed."

"A little. But I did get to hop on a surveillance plane that flew over Nagasaki right after Japan surrendered. The devastation was horrendous. It was hard to believe that one bomb could level an entire city like that. It was awful." They sat silently for a couple of moments.

They never lacked for conversation. Sometimes they talked about their backgrounds and their dreams for the future. Geoff told Cynthia a little about his parents and his brother, Edward, and how they were raised in a traditional home. His father worked for the Agriculture Department in Washington, and they lived in Arlington, where he and his brother went to school. He and his brother usually spent summers with their grandparents at the old home place in Georgia where he learned firsthand about agriculture and raising pigs. It was hard, sweltering work and they loved every minute.

"I'm proud to say that my Southern roots run deep. The first Stuarts braved coming to the colonies with nothing. They landed in the Carolinas and drifted south from there. They fought in the Revolution and the War Between the States. They endured hard times and loss, but they were hard-working, determined people. Nothing defeated them."

"It's so wonderful that you know that history, Geoff, Cynthia responded. "I know so little about my family."

"Yes, my grandfather built the home place in Georgia, attended medical school, and made the rounds of his patients by horseback… why, it's inspirational!" Cynthia looked at Geoff's beaming face as he talked about a heritage that he was so proud of.

Geoff went on to tell her about how all his uncles attended college and had gone on to important careers, many in government service. He was proud of a family that had worked hard, achieved much, and been successful in whatever they tried.

Cynthia could see how driven Geoff was to achieve his own success.

Cynthia didn't share much about her family. There wasn't much to tell. "My father is in the insurance business. I'm an only child and, except for my grandmother, who died a couple of years ago, we don't see other relations very often." She told Geoff, "My dad is kind of a gruff man sometimes, but he has his soft side. My mother is quiet and doesn't do much."

She fell silent as she remembered how her parents rarely talked about events of the day, or for that matter, much of anything at all. Except that sometimes her father would shout at her mother if dinner wasn't ready on time and if the shirt he wanted to wear hadn't been ironed. Her mother never said anything, except to meekly whisper, "I'm sorry, dear." She remembered when her dad kissed her goodbye at the dock that he smelled of liquor. After years of loneliness and disappointment, any respect she had for her parents was long gone. Cynthia was desperate to have a different kind of life. Thank goodness her grandmother had left her that Trust!

"Cynthia! Are you OK?" Geoff was peering at her with concern.

She shook her head and said, "Oh, I was just thinking about home. I guess I drifted away for a minute." She smiled.

"You must miss your folks a lot."

"Sometimes… but I'm fine. I love it here." She patted his hand while thinking just how little she really missed her parents.

Here in Grenoble, Cynthia was determined to make the most of her time: study hard, have fun and take advantage of every opportunity to see and do as much as she could. Even with all the attention Geoff gave her, it never crossed her mind that he might be falling in love with her. She thought of Geoff as a sweet, nice person to spend spare time with, but nothing else. She had let him put his arms around her and kiss her, but she never took it seriously. She thought it was fun, but that was all. It didn't mean anything.

She believed that romance and marriage were transitory at best. Love was a fleeting fantasy, leading to a life of drab days and

regret. If she allowed the romance to pull her in, she was sure she would never realize her dream of personal significance, real happiness, and independence.

After returning from one of her excursions with Geoff, she was confronted by one of the women who lived in the hostel. Cynthia had a private room, one of a handful in the hostel, and Mila had a habit of stopping by to chat, much to Cynthia's despair. She bluntly asked her, "What's going on with you and Geoff? Is a wedding being planned?"

Cynthia laughed, "What silliness are you talking about?"

"I'm telling you, Cynthia, he is crazy about you! Everyone knows it." Cynthia had opened her door only a crack to prevent Mila from coming into her room and taking up residence.

Cynthia rolled her eyes at the idea. "You think so? Just because we've gone out a few times doesn't mean anything. We're only good friends."

"Mon Dieu, Cynthia, you and Geoff have been an item for over a year. And good friends don't neck on the park benches at the Fontaine aux Dauphins!" Cynthia, suddenly embarrassed, looked down but said nothing.

Mila continued, "I've seen the way he looks at you. He is head over heels in love with you!" Mila tried to edge her way through the open door. Cynthia didn't budge.

"Oh, really? Mila, you're making something out of nothing. He's a nice, intelligent man and I enjoy spending time with him, but you are very much mistaken. It's just harmless fun. Excuse me, but I have to study." Cynthia gently pushed Mila out of the way as she closed the door.

One Saturday evening, Geoff met Cynthia for what had become their weekly dinner date. He had flowers.

"My goodness, Geoff! Why the flowers?"

"Cynthia, I saw these and they were so beautiful… they reminded me of you. So.." he extended the flowers to Cynthia, who hesitantly took them. She felt silly and self-conscious as she briefly held them up to her nose.

"They're beautiful, Geoff. Thank you."

He leaned in and kissed her gently on her lips. "You are very

welcome." He gazed into her eyes, pulled her close, and kissed her again. "Shall we go to dinner?"

"Let me take these back to my room and put them in water. I'll be right back." Cynthia briefly considered not coming back. After their dinner, she wished she had followed her first impulse.

He chose a better than usual restaurant and ordered champagne. After dinner, they left the restaurant and walked to a little town square with a central fountain they liked, found a wrought iron bench, and sat down. Geoff put his arm around her and pulled her close, grasping her hand. They looked up at the twinkling lights of the square and listened to the water splashing from the mouths of the cupid-riding dolphins at the base of the fountain. The waxing crescent moon seemed brighter tonight than usual. The quiet was broken by the splashing of the fountain and soft voices from other couples walking through the square.

"Cynthia, we've been seeing each other for quite some time now, but I've never told you just how much you mean to me. I hope you feel the same." He looked so earnest and sincere as he gazed into her eyes and held her hand. She said nothing but smiled weakly. Mila's words suddenly popped into Cynthia's mind. She pushed the thought away.

Geoff pulled her closer and said, "You know my plans to enter the Foreign Service." She nodded silently. "I have to say I never thought I would meet anyone like you, perfect in every way for that kind of life!"

"Geoff…" Cynthia saw what was coming. This was wrong.

Geoff hurried on. "Not only are you beautiful, talented, and smart, but fluent in French, too. Like me, you love to travel to foreign places, and you assimilate like a native. I've never heard you complain once about missing home and the States."

"Geoff, remember I have dreams…"

Geoff broke in quickly. "I couldn't ask for a better partner. With you by my side, what adventures we will have!" His face was suffused with rapture and expectation.

"What are you saying, Geoff?" Cynthia felt blindsided. Yes, they had gotten close and she'd certainly enjoyed his kisses and… but not this!

"Cynthia, I'm asking you to be my wife! I'm in love with you and I want to marry you!" Stunned, Cynthia pulled her hand away from his and leaned against the bench backrest. Geoff's look of joy quickly faded.

Later, after she convinced him that she had simply been surprised by his declaration, she promised to consider his proposal. Outside the hostel, he kissed her goodnight and promised again to give her time to think about his proposal. Cynthia almost felt sorry for him.

The next morning on her way to the laundry, Cynthia ran into Mila. Cynthia put her head down, hoping to avoid any conversation. But as she passed, Mila grabbed her arm.

"How was your date last night? I heard it was quite special."

Cynthia was aghast. "What did you hear? Who else knows?"

"Oh, you know how things get around. Marguerite saw you bring in the flowers and Ricard and I saw you and Geoff go into that fancy restaurant. Did he propose? I bet he did, am I right?" Mila smiled.

Cynthia shifted the bag of laundry slung over her shoulder. "So, what if he did? I told him I need more time to think about it."

"Cynthia, don't tell me you're thinking of rejecting him? A man like that?"

"I have my own plans." Cynthia felt herself getting annoyed. She started to walk on by, but Mila stood in her way.

"Don't you think Geoff deserves to know how you really feel?"

"I'll tell him in my own time. Now, excuse me, Mila!"

Mila shook her head and looked into Cynthia's eyes. "Yes, you are right to carefully consider your answer. A good marriage requires not only love but trust and a giving heart. Hearts are easily broken."

Cynthia laughed and snapped back, "You see too many movies." Mila's mouth dropped open. "Besides, I never promised him anything. And love… I'm not sure I know what that means. Do you? Now, get out of my way, Mila, and mind your own business!"

Mila threw up her hands as she watched Cynthia walk away.

CINQ

"Grow a thick skin - a very thick skin. And watch your back. For every back, there is a knife." Lily Chatterjee

V. Grenoble. February 1951

In the final months before everyone went their separate ways, Geoff continued to pressure Cynthia for her answer. She kept putting him off, saying "Why can't we go on as we are for now? Let's wait until we complete our education here and then we'll talk about it." Time was running out.

Cynthia's focus was not on Geoff and marriage, or even on what she would finally say to him. Instead, she was focused on her 21st birthday when she would become a woman of independent means. She expected a telegram from her father any day about her inheritance. He had been chintzy with her allowance, sending only half of what she had asked for. Thanks to Geoff's generosity, she had managed, and now she was happy that she would have even more money for Paris! It was almost a month now since her last allowance and it had been a smaller amount than usual. Her money better come soon.

Geoff behaved as if he didn't have a worry in the world. He told her that his father had set up a job interview for him at some government agency in Washington. Whenever she mentioned her

dream to live and work in Paris, he brushed it aside and talked about his career goals instead. It annoyed her that he didn't take her plans seriously, but he'd see, just like everyone else.

One day after lunch he reminded her that it was only two weeks before they received their certificates. Cynthia's mind turned to her life in Paris and her eyes lit up with happiness and excitement that she would be there soon.

But Geoff's mind was on something else. "Aren't you excited, Cynthia? Although I'll be sorry to leave here, this has been only one chapter of our life together! There is so much to look forward to, isn't there?" Geoff gave her an embrace and kissed her cheek.

"I'll be sorry to leave Grenoble, too, Geoff." She turned her head away and pulled back slightly. "And you're right, there is so much to look forward to. You, with the Foreign Service and me…"

Geoff interrupted, "You as my wife and making a home for the two of us, and someday… maybe children?" He gazed into her eyes expectantly.

Cynthia's eyes darted skyward and she laughed nervously. "Children? Oh my, I can't think about that now! Really, Geoff, I have so much to do… you know, final exams and packing… but I'll see you later… OK?" Geoff reluctantly released her and watched as she ran up the steps and disappeared into the library.

A week later, Cynthia had not yet heard from her father. She should have gotten the telegram by now and nervously wondered at the delay. One afternoon upon entering the foyer of the hostel, the concierge called out to her and handed over the telegram. Cynthia ran up to her room, sat down on the bed, and ripped it open. She glanced at the closing and saw that her mother had sent it! All at once, she felt a chill. The telegram was brief.

The telegram read: "Your father invested all the Trust in his business. No further funds are available. $25 in the mail with more information…" Cynthia crushed the telegram in her hand without reading the rest. She screamed in pain, "No! This can't be true!" Surely there must be some explanation, something she missed. After a moment, she smoothed out the telegram and read it to the

end.

But it was no use. Her inheritance was gone, plain and simple. Cynthia read and reread the telegram as the tears flowed. "That drunken bastard! How could he do this to me?" She crumpled up the telegram again and threw it against the wall. "He didn't invest it, he stole it! I had over $8,000 and now I have nothing. What am I going to do now?" As Cynthia ranted and wailed, a few women stood outside her closed door, not willing to interrupt.

"What do you think happened?" they asked each other. "It must be horrible. I've never heard Cynthia so angry. I don't know about you, but I'm not going in there." One by one they went back to their rooms.

After a while, Cynthia dried her tears. She knew she needed to decide what she was going to do. Any legal recourse she had was out of the question. She had no money to hire an attorney to sue her father. Even if she was successful in suing her father, he obviously had no money with which to repay her. His business had eaten up her Trust so there was very little there. He'd have to sell the house and he and her mother would be homeless. As much as she wanted to hurt her father, she couldn't do such a thing to her mother, a hapless bystander to his swindle. She wanted to be logical and not let her emotions rule her. She'd seen her mother let her emotions take over, usually with disastrous results.

Like the time her mother had gone shopping for shoes for her father but had come home with a new hat and some pearl earrings for herself. Her father blew up and called her mother 'stupid' and other terrible names, and even implied she stole the money from his billfold. Cynthia tried to find out why her mother had done such a thing.

"You know Cynthia, I hardly ever buy anything for myself. I make most of my own dresses and…" she held the handkerchief up to her nose and wiped her eyes again and said, "your father forgot our anniversary last month and I can't remember the last time he brought me flowers or anything for my birthday. I guess I was feeling a little blue and forgotten. I don't know what caused me to buy those things." She looked up at Cynthia with red-

rimmed eyes. "But that hat and the earrings were so beautiful. I felt young and pretty when I tried them on." She lowered her head and whispered, "I'll have to take them back, of course." She started to cry again.

Cynthia had to admit, that she didn't feel very sorry for her mother at the time. She should have known better. Cynthia would never be like her mother, silly and thoughtless. Cynthia had to be clear-headed and smart.

She sat down at her desk and pulled out some paper. She wrote 'Paris' at the top of one piece of paper and drew a line down the middle, making two columns. At the head of the first column, she wrote 'Pro' and at the top of the second column she wrote 'Con'. On the second piece of paper, she did the same, but with 'Geoff' at the top. She sat back in her chair and stared at the blank pages, her thoughts a jumble of anger, hurt and crushing disappointment. She felt as if her life was suddenly meaningless. As she slowly stood up, she felt weighed down as if she had an anchor tied around her waist. She briefly looked down at the papers on her desk and then shuffled over to the window and stared out at the snow-covered Alps. When someone knocked on her door, she shouted back, "Go away!"

She stood there, silently weeping until the room was dark and only the far away peaks could be seen in the final rays of the setting sun. She dried her tears and walked back to her desk, turned on the small lamp, and sat down. Then she picked up her pen and began to write.

After a couple of hours of agony, hope, second-guessing, and a dose of brutal reality, she reviewed her work. The 'Paris' paper had some wonderful pros: the culmination of her career dreams of accomplishment and significance, independence, and living among the French in a culture that she loved so much. But when she looked at the 'Con' column, her heart sank.

The list was too long, starting with no money. Even after the money from her mother arrived, she would be penniless in no time. The next items were just as deflating: her lack of job experience, no contacts, no resources, and not even a friend to room with. Cynthia read the Paris newspapers and she knew there

was a housing shortage. Even if she could find something, it would be too expensive. She also knew that after the war, men had priority for any available jobs, especially the kind she wanted. She briefly considered trying for a job here at the University, maybe at the library, until she could save up enough money… but she quickly dismissed it. She knew anything she earned would barely cover her living expenses.

She had to admit that despite her ambition and determination, her chances of success were slim. She refused to compromise her ambition by settling for a waitress job or selling trinkets in some grubby shop and living in a cheap hotel. She just couldn't live that way. She lay the paper down with a sigh of anguish.

Then she looked at the 'Geoff' pros and cons. The big 'con' was that she didn't love him. She didn't know why she didn't love him, but she was sure that as much as she tried, 'it', whatever that was, just wasn't there. Another was the possibility of a subservient life and motherhood. Geoff was a true 'Southern Gentleman' and she understood his expectations.

But the items in the 'pro' column weren't too bad. First was Geoff's ambition to serve in exciting foreign locales with a non-traditional, prestigious lifestyle with the US Foreign Service. With his strong family connections, his success was assured.

Another 'pro' was the money Geoff could earn. He told her that, depending on where they were sent, many living expenses may be provided including furnished housing. He told her about his brother's government service overseas and how he was able to save just about everything he earned. His wife even had a live-in maid! After her years of counting pennies and now this disaster with her Trust, a solid income and a life of comfort sounded very appealing.

As Geoff's wife, she would also be able to travel all over the world. They could have holidays in Italy, sail the Mediterranean, and see places she'd never even heard of yet! She caught herself smiling at the prospect.

Even though she knew she didn't love Geoff, she was sure she could get past that. "After all," she thought, "I am fond of him." Maybe she could convince him not to have children, especially

with living overseas. She didn't forget her dream to do something important either. "Who knows what opportunities I'll have, especially with Geoff's connections?"

One option remained for Cynthia. "I can go home to Kansas City." As far as Cynthia was concerned that option wasn't worth thinking about. "I would be admitting to my lying father that I'm a failure. I won't do it. I won't go back there!"

Cynthia spent the next few hours reviewing her 'logical' choices over and over. After more rage and more tears, by 1 a.m., Cynthia realized she didn't have any more time. Whatever she did, it could end up a disaster. But doing nothing was even worse. She was exhausted but she forced herself to make up her mind. She had to make it work, right or wrong.

The next morning as Cynthia was locking her door, Mila walked up and put her hand on Cynthia's shoulder. "Are you alright? We heard you yesterday and we've been worried."

With a stern, unsmiling face, Cynthia responded, "I don't know what you're talking about. I'm perfectly fine. By the way, have you seen Geoff today?"

"He came by last evening, but when you didn't answer your door, we sent him away. He seemed upset."

"Well, I don't know why." Cynthia walked down the stairs and out the door.

When she came out the front door, she saw Geoff sitting on a nearby planter waiting for her. He quickly jumped up and ran to her. "Are you alright? I came by last night, but the girls said you weren't answering your door."

"What is wrong with everyone? I'm perfectly fine." Cynthia grasped Geoff's arm and smiled. "Why don't you take me to lunch so we can talk. Tell me more about the Foreign Service and what you'll do and where you might be sent. How soon do you think you might get a posting?" Geoff tucked her arm under his and looked at her with awe. "And Geoff," she continued with a flutter of her eyelashes, "how does a wife spend her time in these French-speaking countries?"

SIX

"Anger is one letter short of danger." Eleanor Roosevelt

VI. Vienna, Virginia 1957

The little boy knelt on the couch with his hands on the windowsill, crying as he saw his parents get in the car and drive away. The strong scent of dust on the windowsill made him feel forsaken, like a musty toy lost under the bed. Randy Stuart was just five and all alone in the house.

Randy loved to challenge his two and half-year-old little brother, Brian, to a race down the hall. Their mother kept telling them not to run in the house, but Randy loved to run. Brian, still so little with his chubby legs, ran full speed with his head down. He plowed headfirst right into the outside corner of a doorway. Brian began to scream as the blood flowed down his face. Randy backed up against the wall when he realized everyone was mad at him.

Cynthia yelled, "I told you boys not to run in the house! Randy, see now what you've done?" Geoff jerked up Randy and sat him down on the sofa, telling him not to move.

"Geoff, we need to go! Come on!" The front door slammed shut, and the house was suddenly quiet. Everyone was gone, and Randy was alone and scared.

He sat back down on the sofa and looked around the empty, quiet room. Then he pulled his legs up, lay down, and cried

himself to sleep. The house was dark by the time his parents returned hours later.

Geoff was surprised to find Randy in the same spot he'd left him. He felt a twinge of guilt about leaving Randy alone for so long, especially in the dark, but he told himself that Randy was fine. No harm done. Cynthia, however, was still angry. "Get to bed young man. And no supper." Geoff looked at her and frowned. But he said nothing.

Shortly after their marriage, Geoff began to call Cynthia 'Bal', a derivation of Bella Donna, meaning beautiful woman in Italian – but also a plant whose foliage and berries are extremely toxic. It seemed fitting to him somehow. She was a beautiful woman, but when she got angry… Watch out!

While Geoff was content with their life, Cynthia suffered, and the resentment was beginning to show. This typical housewife life was not what she signed up for. He was thrilled with his job with the Department of Agriculture in Washington D.C., but Cynthia's patience was wearing thin. When they first married, Geoff promised they would get a Foreign Service posting soon. It had been over six years and still she waited.

One of Geoff's long-time friends, Bobby Daniels, lived on the next block. His wife, Darlene, asked Cynthia over for coffee from time to time, but they never quite clicked as friends. Geoff and Bobby played tennis or golf on the weekends, and on rare occasions, the couples would get together for dinner out.

Geoff could tell, however, that Cynthia didn't enjoy these outings much. Although polite and agreeable, she rarely engaged in the lively conversation, usually about politics or stories from their wartime experiences. She sipped her Canadian Club and remained reserved and quiet. Geoff couldn't figure it out.

"Bal, don't you like the Daniels? You don't seem to enjoy these evenings out very much."

"Oh, I don't know. I don't have much in common with Darlene and you and Bobby have known each other so long… I can't compete with that."

"Nothing in common? Why, you have a lot in common! You're both mothers and housewives. Darlene has traveled and

been to college just like you. I'd think you'd have lots to talk about." Geoff peered at her quizzically. It was clear he didn't understand. Cynthia's blood began to boil.

"You think that's all I am, don't you? A housewife! This is not what I wanted. You promised me a life overseas. It's been six years and I am bored out of my mind! Tell me, Geoff. How long do I have to wait? Or did you lie to me just like every other man? Why did I think I could trust you?"

Geoff snapped back, "Cynthia, I have never lied to you!" She glared at him. Geoff took a breath and said, "I had no idea you were so unhappy. We go sailing and we go to the club all the time. Is that so bad?"

"Not for some, I guess, but I've always wanted more for myself. I wish you could understand." Cynthia looked at him in frustration.

"I thought we had a great life and I'm sorry it means so little to you." Geoff got up from his chair and walked over to the cold fireplace and looked at a framed picture sitting on the mantle. It was of the two of them, taken on their wedding day. He sighed and said, "I can't help it that there are no openings in my field. But I've been assured that as soon as something comes up…"

Ignoring his hurt expression, Cynthia interrupted, "You don't know what it's like, Geoff! While you go off every day to a stimulating job with important people, I'm stuck here with these two little boys, cooking and cleaning up their messes. Sometimes I look at those boys and wish they would just grow up!"

Geoff was stunned. "Cynthia! Randy and Brian are our own sons. You can't mean that!"

Not hearing him, Cynthia continued to rant. "I can't do anything or go anywhere. The other women only care about recipes and their children. And the constant birthday parties! It seems like there's one every week and I have to get a present and they always want me to help… I'm telling you, Geoff, I don't know how much more of this I can take."

She leaped from her chair and stood before her husband, her face twisted in rage. "I wanted a career. I wanted to do something important. And this is not it!" Geoff's look of horror didn't deter

her. "Get me out of here, Geoff…or else!" She turned and ran into the bedroom and slammed the door.

"Maybe things will be different when my overseas posting comes through," Geoff murmured. "Maybe she'll be happy then." He shook his head as he wiped at his eyes. "It better come through soon. I don't know what I'll do if she leaves me."

SEPT

"If you want something said, ask a man; if you want something done, ask a woman." Margaret Thatcher

VII. Vienna, Virginia. July 1958

In mid-1958 Geoffrey received his long-awaited appointment to the Agency for International Development (AID), an organization within the State Department. Its purpose was to administer aid for economic, political, and social development. Geoff's years of training and experience with the Department of Agriculture would be utilized to improve the quality and quantity of agricultural yields in the developing world, not only improving lives but, more importantly, furthering American interests. Geoff's years of work with the USDA turned out to be a critical factor in his appointment.

The French he worked on so diligently, with Cynthia's continual tutoring, would now pay off. His orders were to proceed to Cambodia, a former French colony on the other side of the world. Geoff couldn't wait to tell Cynthia.

"Bal, guess what?" he called out as he entered the door. Cynthia heard the excitement in his voice, and she ran into the living room from the kitchen, holding a potholder. He looked into her expectant eyes and with a big smile shouted out, "We have

orders! We're going to Cambodia!" Cynthia whooped and threw her potholder in the air as she threw her arms around Geoff.

"Finally, I can escape this dull life!" She ran over to the bookshelf and pulled out the world atlas. She and Geoff sat down on the sofa and with the atlas in their laps excitedly flipped the pages, finally locating this strange country where they would live.

Dinner was long forgotten. When Randy said he was hungry, Cynthia quickly made peanut butter sandwiches and let the boys sit on the floor in front of the TV to eat before sending them off to bed. She and Geoff talked long into the night about all this appointment would mean for them.

"Cynthia, this country has only been independent of the French since 1954. Things can be quite rugged and, outside the cities, even primitive. The government is not completely stable."

"I'm not really worried about any of that. It's good to know, but I'm sure we can manage all right, don't you? The State Department wouldn't send us to a place that was dangerous, right?"

"Yes, that's true. From what I was told, the cities are quite modern but don't expect supermarkets or anything close to the kind of food we're used to. It will be quite hot and humid most of the time, too. We'll all have a lot of adjusting to do."

"It all sounds fascinating to me, Geoff. I've been waiting for this so long; I'm not going to let a few inconveniences bother me. We'll adjust in time."

"The agency will provide some training on the culture and other things to expect, and of course, we won't be completely on our own. There is a diplomatic community as well as the Embassy itself. We'll have plenty of resources and new friends and activities."

"That's what I was thinking about, Geoff! What kind of activities will we be able to take advantage of?"

"I'm not sure, yet, but I heard that hunting is one of the best in the world if you like that kind of thing. I'm planning on taking my hunting rifles with me."

"I've only been out with you a couple of times, but I'm willing to go hunting with you out there. Didn't you tell me that I was a

quick learner and a good shot for a beginner?" Cynthia beamed at him. She didn't need an answer, she knew she was good.

"Certainly, that sounds fine, Cynthia." Geoff sounded a little dubious. "But we have plenty of time before we leave to learn more about the places to see and things to do in Cambodia."

Cynthia leaned back on the sofa with a sigh. "This is so exciting, Geoff! When do you think we'll leave, and which route do you think we will take to get to Phnom Penh?" She held a large map of the Pacific and Southeast Asia in her lap.

"I have to report the second week in January 1959. I don't know yet how much time we'll be allowed for travel." He looked down at the map in Cynthia's lap. "I think we'll fly from here to Los Angeles and then, we can sail to Hawaii and on to Hong Kong before finally arriving in Cambodia." He pointed at a small area at the tip of the country in the Gulf of Siam. "There is a new port here at Kampong Som. From there we'll probably fly the rest of the way to Phnom Penh. The entire trip will take a lot of time and the children…"

She interrupted, "What about those Pan Am Clippers? They have sleeping bunks, don't they?"

"You want to fly? I think sailing would be much easier on everyone."

"Oh no, Geoff! That will take way too long, don't you agree? And maybe we would have time for a couple of stops along the way!"

In the months ahead there were orientations and cultural briefings to attend, physical exams and shots to be endured, and packing to be done.

Geoff watched as Cynthia took charge of everything. "I'm amazed, Cynthia. I thought that you would be overwhelmed with all that needs to be accomplished before our departure date: the packing, cleaning out the house, and getting it sold, not to mention the travel arrangements!"

"Oh no, Geoff, I love it! Everything that gets checked off my list gets us closer to our new life in Cambodia. Oh, by the way, what do you think about spending a few days in Hong Kong to

get a couple of lightweight suits made for you? I've heard that we can get tailor-made suits in Hong Kong for very reasonable prices. I might even pick up some summer-weight clothes for myself. How does that sound to you?"

Geoff smiled, entranced by her beaming face. "Of course, we can spend a few days in Hong Kong if that's what you want."

"That's fine. I've been checking around to find out how much time the tailors need. By the way, I think I'll go downtown soon to Maple Avenue, you know, where that new shopping mall is, and pick up some clothes and shoes for the boys. I'll get some things a size or two bigger so they can grow into them."

"You think of everything, don't you?"

"Oh, I just thought... do you have the date of your last day at work, yet? I need that before I can plan our itinerary. Do you quit or is it a transfer?"

As Cynthia said, each task, each day of planning and packing meant she was that much closer to leaving her 'housewife' life behind for good.

The time passed quickly and soon they were on a TriStar Constellation to Los Angeles. Cynthia and the boys had never flown before and she was nervous and excited all at the same time. She made sure she had the window seat since she didn't want to miss anything. Looking out the window as they taxied to the runway, she saw another airplane land. As they rolled toward the runway, she saw other airplanes intersecting the taxiways, either on their way to the terminal or to get in line for takeoff, like them. Cynthia was captivated. When the plane took off... her heart thumped with excitement! She decided right then that this was the only way to travel.

After landing in Los Angeles, the family stored some of their luggage in lockers inside the terminal and then took a cab to Anaheim for a two-night stay at the Disneyland Hotel. Randy liked to watch the Walt Disney Presents program on TV on Friday nights and knew all about Disneyland. He was so excited he could hardly sleep.

When Cynthia realized how large the park was, she suggested they split up and meet back on Main Street for lunch. "I'll take

Randy around to the places he wants to see, and you can take care of Brian. He's still so little, he'll get tired with too much walking. I know, you can take him to Fantasyland. I'm sure Brian will love that."

She looked at Randy, Geoff, and Brian sitting on a park bench across the bridge from Sleeping Beauty's Castle. "Then after lunch, we can all take a ride on the train. How about that? We can meet back here at 11:30." Geoff only nodded as Cynthia grabbed Randy's hand and scurried away toward Tomorrow Land. She wanted to see that House of the Future.

When the family met for lunch, Randy told his father about all the rides he'd been on. "I drove a real car at the Autopia Freeway, we went on the Matterhorn bobsleds, and we saw monkeys, elephants, and hippopotamuses when we rode a riverboat on the African Safari!"

"Real elephants? The very idea." Geoff responded. He didn't mention that Brian didn't like the rides in Fantasy Land. He had been scared, especially of Mr. Toad's Wild Ride.

Soon, their day of fun was over, and the family boarded the monorail back to their hotel for the night. After breakfast the following morning, Cynthia was surprised when Geoff escorted them to the nearby Disneyland Heliport, where they boarded a Sikorsky S-55 twelve-passenger helicopter.

"Aren't you full of surprises!" Cynthia laughed as the helicopter lifted off and tipping forward slightly, began its fifteen-minute flight to LAX International Airport. Geoff smiled back at her happy, flushed face. He put his arm around Brian's shoulders and held him tight. Randy was so excited he could hardly contain himself.

Once they arrived at LAX, they boarded a flight to San Francisco from where they would continue their journey toward their faraway destination, Cambodia. Back in Virginia when Cynthia told Geoff about their detour to Disneyland, he voiced his annoyance, but, of course, he eventually gave in. He decided she wanted to visit the place as much as Randy. He thought it was waste of time.

When Cynthia saw their airplane, a Pan American

Stratocruiser, sitting out on the tarmac in San Francisco, she felt excited to get on board and see what it was like. The stewardess welcomed them at the door, and another escorted them to their seats in the upper deck's main cabin. Everything had a luxurious feel with roomy, comfortable seating. Cynthia noticed the pull-down berths above their seats.

Once they were settled the stewardess walked up and down the aisle to make sure everyone was seated with their seatbelts on. Cynthia looked across the aisle at Randy and it was clear he was just as happy as she was. His face was plastered to the window while Brian was curled up in a ball, trying not to cry. The engines powered up slightly and soon they were rolling along the taxiway. The plane turned into takeoff position and stopped briefly as the engines roared to life and revved up to a screaming pitch. Next, they began their race down the runway faster and faster. Cynthia put her head back and closed her eyes until she felt the wheels lift off and she looked out the window at the landscape below. She liked this part the best.

Geoff later explained to the boys that they were scheduled to stop in Hawaii and Midway to refuel. One of the stewardesses came by and offered Randy an Etch-a-Sketch. He'd never even heard of it before but was soon transfixed. Brian, who was sitting next to Cynthia, was handed a small tray with a coloring book and crayons. Cynthia took the tray and leaned toward Brian. "Dry your tears, now, Brian, and thank the nice lady."

After everyone was served a deluxe meal, the boys soon fell asleep in their seats. The stewardess asked if she should pull down their beds. "Oh, that won't be necessary for now," Cynthia replied. "Mr. Stuart and I are going down to the lounge, so if you could keep an eye on them…?"

"Of course, Madame." The stately Indian stewardess brought out blankets which she draped over Randy and Brian as they slept.

In the lounge, Cynthia relaxed on the comfortable sofa while Geoff ordered their drinks. Everyone was dressed to the 'nines' and she could tell there was a lot of money among their fellow travelers. She smiled while she looked around and thought, "I could get used to this."

After stopping in Hawaii, the bunks were made up and Geoff helped the boys into their beds. Cynthia excused herself to the large bathroom where she changed out of her two-piece suit and heels into her pajamas and robe before crawling into her bunk for the night. The hum of the engines lulled her into a dreamless sleep.

After another layover in Tokyo, they changed to a Boeing DC 8. About two hours out from Japan, the plane lost an engine. When the engine flamed out, which could be seen outside Geoff and Cynthia's window, Geoff gently took Cynthia's hand and said, "It's nothing to worry about, Bal. The captain will let us know if we have to turn back or land somewhere else."

"I'm not worried, Geoff. I'm sure the pilots know what to do when these things happen, don't they?" He looked at her in surprise. She was as cool as a cucumber; in fact, she seemed to be fascinated by it all. Right then the captain's voice came over the speaker and he said that the plane would return to Tokyo. "Just a minor malfunction, folks. Nothing to be concerned about." There were several groans from the passengers around them.

Cynthia said, "See, it's a little inconvenient, but there's nothing to worry about. We just have to be flexible."

Geoff looked at her incredulously. "Aren't you worried about our safety?"

"Of course not! Those pilots can handle this. Aren't there three other engines?"

"Well, yes, but we'll be delayed getting to Hong Kong! We might lose our hotel reservations."

"We'll just have to deal with it." Cynthia settled back into her pillow and closed her eyes. Geoff shook his head in wonderment.

After more delays and an extremely late arrival at their hotel in Hong Kong, Geoff and Cynthia were totally exhausted. They settled the boys into bed and looked at each other silently, thinking the same thoughts. Here they were, 14,000 miles from home, with two small boys and a pile of luggage to be managed, and still a long way from their destination. "I hope we're doing the right thing," Geoff muttered.

HUIT

"For years, the Foreign Service couple was considered a 'twofer' - two for the price of one." Barbara Gamarekian

VIII. Phnom Penh. January 1959

After arrival at the Phnom Penh airport, the family was temporarily installed in a small furnished two-bedroom guest house in Phnom Penh. It was all quite an adjustment for them. It took the family several days to get used to the time change… and the weather! They had left Virginia in the winter, with snow and ice on the ground. Now their days were sunny, hot, and humid. This was January and it would only get hotter. Even with intermittent rain showers, it never seemed to cool off.

Through it all, Cynthia and Randy enjoyed every minute. They were fascinated with the ornate French colonial architecture alongside hastily constructed, featureless buildings, the white-gloved traffic cops amid the crazy street traffic with honking horns, and cyclos loaded with passengers and packages. The pedestrians walked in every direction, and Cynthia and Randy held their breath at the sight of pedestrians barely escaping injury or death from careening cars and trucks, bicycles, and Vespas. Randy was delighted when he saw all the monkeys running in the streets and jumping from tree to tree, even jumping into open windows of vehicles, looking for handouts of food. The street vendors took

up every inch of available space with piles of plantains, bins of mangos and other fruit, straw hats, scarves and clothing, tools, cookware, and every kind of trinket a tourist might want to buy. The smells of raw fish, roasted chicken, and other unrecognizable meat permeated the air and mixed with reeking gasoline fumes.

Geoff and Brian, on the other hand, were not quite as content. Geoff worked hard to master his boss's management style as well as his responsibilities. There were endless meetings and weekly road trips to review ongoing projects. Learning a new job was nerve-racking And Brian? Brian just wanted to go home.

Before long, the family moved again. The newer two-bedroom apartment they moved into was in an Embassy-owned complex at Pochentong, a neighborhood of Phnom Penh. AID and other US Agency families lived there, making up a small community that was intended to help with cultural adjustments, making the environment more like home. It wasn't the environment Cynthia was hoping for.

The compound was an impressive set of three modern-looking buildings of white-painted concrete, set in a large U shape around a central courtyard, within walking distance of the US Embassy. No grass was planted in the courtyard but it included several Kapok trees that resembled huge umbrellas. There was also a good-sized play area and sandbox for the children.

The Stuart apartment was located on the first floor, accessed by a set of stairs. The three floors of apartments were built up on large supports, one story from ground level, to protect from monsoon flooding. The Stuarts parked their new British Hillman Minx automobile in the space under their apartment. "At least we have only one neighbor next to our apartment," Cynthia said to Geoff as he helped her rearrange the stark modern living room furniture. "Maybe we'll be able to avoid the rest most of the time."

"Cynthia! I'm surprised at you. Why would you want to avoid them? I thought you would love having other Americans for neighbors."

As usual, Cynthia wasn't listening. "Frankly, I'm disappointed that we have to live in this ugly apartment building on this busy street. I was hoping we could have a regular house away from the

agency families. Geoff, do you think we could find someplace like that?"

"We just moved in!" Geoff shoved the sofa against the wall and plugged in the floor lamp. "But I'll put the word out. It may be a while before I find anything, so don't get your hopes up," he grumbled. "Anything to keep you happy."

Each bedroom had a small window air conditioner. The apartment complex maintained two small generators which were used to run the air conditioners when necessary. Rolling blackouts were common. There was a perimeter fence, and Geoff noticed that the Cambodians posted their secret service outside to monitor who was going in and out of the compound. A heavily traveled road was just outside the main entrance.

Much to Cynthia's delight, she found that all the other families hired Vietnamese or Chinese maids to take care of the cooking, cleaning, and washing. The transplants found the weather too daunting for these tasks, and Cynthia was happy to comply. Wives of other Foreign Service personnel advised against hiring Cambodians. "The Cambodian women work hard, but they let the children run wild. They won't enforce your rules." Cynthia could only think about the freedom she would have.

There was a small commissary at the Embassy which provided canned goods, powdered milk, and every now and then, some fresh produce. There was no bread or fresh meat, fish or poultry. The Stuarts adapted to and eventually came to love the ethnic food their new cook, Hahn, prepared with ingredients purchased in the local open-air markets.

The Ambassador's wife visited Cynthia one morning soon after their arrival at Pochentong. She knocked on the door at 10 o'clock and introduced herself with a small handshake. Cynthia invited her in and while the lady picked out a chair near the coffee table, Cynthia brought out tall glasses of lemonade and cookies on a tray. She was glad she had prepared the refreshments early since she'd had no idea when the woman would arrive. Much to Cynthia's frustration, Geoff only mentioned her impending visit as he walked out the door that morning.

She was dressed in a short-sleeved blue sateen, belted dress with a very full skirt and matching pumps. Cynthia heard the crushing of the crinolines as she sat down. She also wore wrist-length white gloves and a pillbox hat with an attached netting pulled over her eyes. Cynthia thought she looked to be about fifty years old, maybe a little younger, with graying auburn hair. Cynthia sat quietly with her hands folded in her lap as her guest arranged her skirts. Although Cynthia had taken care to wear one of her new dresses with her white ballet flats, she now felt embarrassed that her attire wasn't up to her visitor's obvious standards, who even wore stockings. Cynthia looked down at her bare legs and cringed.

The woman took a sip of the lemonade and looked at Cynthia with a smile. "It is such a pleasure to meet you. We've been looking forward to your arrival and my husband, the Ambassador, is so pleased to have Mr. Stuart on board." She took another sip and put the glass down on the provided coaster. "Now Mrs. Stuart, the main reason I am here this morning is to not only meet you, of course but to help you understand your role and obligations as a new FSO wife."

Cynthia blinked. "Role?" When Cynthia first heard her speak, she detected an unmistakable clipped New England accent. Cynthia smiled and leaned in towards her guest with interest.

"Yes, there are a few things we expect of the FSO's wives. Nothing too taxing, but important all the same." Cynthia perked up. "First of all, you need to have some calling cards printed up as soon as possible."

"Calling cards? What do you mean?" This wasn't mentioned in their orientation back in the States.

"Just like a business card… Here, let me show you one of mine." She picked up her alligator handbag from the sofa beside her, rifled through it, and finally found what she wanted. "Ah, here they are." She held one out for Cynthia. "Now just keep that one so you can see how it should be made up. The Embassy uses a printer here locally. Here, let me write the name of the printer on the back." While her guest pulled out a fountain pen from inside her handbag, Cynthia sat silently, wondering what this all

meant.

Handing the card back to Cynthia, she said, "See, you have your name printed in the center as 'Mrs. Geoffrey Stuart'. Most wives put the name of the Embassy in the right bottom corner, just like what I have, but it's not necessary." Cynthia's shoulders slumped with the realization that a card imprinted with 'Cynthia Jones Stuart' was not to be. She sat silently as the Ambassador's wife explained all her duties as the wife of a new Foreign Service Officer.

The wives were expected to 'call' on other wives of senior foreign service personnel in Phnom Penh. These weekly calls, conducted on a certain day at designated times, included not only wives of senior US Foreign Service Officers, but those from other embassies serving in Cambodia.

"I'll be glad to go with you the first time to introduce you around. After that, you can go with Mrs. Van Metz, or with the other wives here at Pochentong. Or you can go alone if you want, but most all the wives like company on these calls." The Ambassador's wife continued to explain Cynthia's other responsibilities as an FSO wife. Cynthia found it all a little distressful.

"Ma'am, nothing was said about these 'duties' when we had our training. This all comes as quite a surprise."

"Well, it was thought that wives would be more receptive if explained by someone on the ground, so to speak, like me. Cynthia… may I call you Cynthia?" At Cynthia's nod, the woman continued. "All these social duties may seem frivolous to you, but as I said, they are considered critically important. We wives have a golden opportunity to get to know diplomats and their wives, as well as guests from around the world and to demonstrate American culture and prosperity. A friendly, thoughtful wife who shows interest in international events, as well as local goings-on, can be extremely helpful to her husband's career."

"Oh, of course, I understand." The word 'spy' passed through Cynthia's mind.

"You must be discreet and tactful, of course. I find that if one conducts oneself as a representative, not only of the Embassy but

of the United States itself, that, well, one simply cannot go wrong." She paused with a smile. "Remember, Cynthia, that how you dress, where you go, and everything you say and do is being observed by not only the Cambodians but by the international diplomatic community here in Phnom Penh."

Cynthia was thunderstruck. "My goodness. I had no idea."

The lady nodded her head, smiled, and said, "Oh, you'll get used to it. We all generally keep to ourselves anyway, so it's not so bad. However, I must add that how you conduct yourself socially, especially with these duties, will be noted on your husband's annual performance review. You are considered part of the team, Cynthia!" She gave Cynthia another big smile as she snapped shut her handbag and stood up to leave. "I'll let you know when we can get together to 'call'. All right?"

Upon the departure of the Ambassador's wife, Cynthia felt like adding some Vodka to her lemonade. She looked at her refreshment tray on the table, barely touched, and considered all that she had been told. "I wonder if Geoff knew about all this?" If not, she would make sure he was properly informed. She sat back down in her chair, thinking about the extra time she had thought she would have available to follow her own pursuits. That time would now be limited. She had read about the old-fashioned practice of social 'calling', but never dreamed it was still in force anywhere, least of all in a place like this.

When 'calling' the ladies left their cards on a silver tray at each home on their list. They were not always invited in, depending on whether the foreign service wife was 'at home' or not. If invited in, they were offered light refreshments, and pleasantries were briefly exchanged. After a short stay of no more than ten or fifteen minutes, the visiting ladies politely excused themselves and left, moving on to the next home.

Many of the wives at the Pochentong apartments paired up for these mandatory visits. Cynthia decided immediately that she would not pair up with any of them. Instead, she decided to conduct her calls alone or with the wife of Geoff's boss, Mrs. Van Metz. She believed this was one way she could further Geoff's career. Making friends with the boss's wife and presenting a

cultured impression couldn't hurt. She also believed that befriending her neighbors would diminish her own aspirations. In her mind, it would be akin to a company manager socializing with the entry-level staff. Unthinkable.

In addition to the 'calling' responsibility, Cynthia and the other wives were expected to serve as hostesses at receptions or other embassy events for visiting dignitaries. Duties included greeting attendees at the door, providing directions to the reception area, serving refreshments, and mingling with the guests. Several were selected at random and if called upon by the embassy, each wife was required to graciously accept the assignment. No excuses were allowed, except for extremely rare circumstances.

Cynthia's experience with such an event came soon when she was called to help hostess a reception for two visiting US Senators and their entourage. She was a little nervous at first but hit her stride when she was asked about her background and what she thought of Cambodia. She soon found herself engaged in a discussion about France and Canada as well as her experience living in the DC area. She enjoyed showing off her perfect French and ability to mingle as well as the smiles and words of welcome and praise she received in return.

Cynthia found she was quite talented in the art of vague, diplomatically correct conversation required at these functions. She also discovered that the art of 'harmless' flirtation could make a huge difference in how long a man would talk to her and the interesting things he might reveal. Nearby wives, of course, were always taken into careful consideration.

When not busy with these duties, many of the women used the extra time to volunteer at the American school or help with their children's school projects. Some formed craft or card clubs. Bridge clubs were extremely popular. Even if she didn't know how to play bridge, a foreign service wife soon learned, just to have something to do. They took turns hosting from week to week and prepared refreshments. Since no bread could be purchased at the commissary, some of the women got together just to bake bread.

Cocktail parties were fashionable and always popular. All the

personnel from all the embassies in town hosted them regularly. If you worked with the French from time to time, you could count on invitations from the French. If you knew someone from the Italian embassy, you'd get invited to their parties. They were far away from home, and they needed distraction from the relentless weather, the seeming futility of the work, and the ever-present danger and hostility always lurking in the shadows. The parties were a welcome escape. The Stuarts and everyone else loved those cocktail parties.

Geoff and Cynthia never hosted parties. Cynthia made it clear that their home was too small to properly entertain. They preferred to attend those hosted by Geoff's superiors or those hosted by other embassy or station chiefs. Their Pochentong neighbors never ran into them at the more informal parties. They wondered why, but the other women soon came to accept that Cynthia just didn't like being around them. They came to believe she was a social-climbing snob. She rarely spoke to them and never participated in any of their activities. After several refusals, their invitations ceased, which didn't bother Cynthia at all.

One of their neighbors, Stella Gleeson, was often approached by wives of the newer Foreign Office personnel, who asked her, "What's going on with Cynthia? I've tried to talk to her three times since I've been here, and she is always too busy or in a rush to go out the door or something. She doesn't seem too friendly. And it looks like the children, especially the oldest boy, appear to be completely unsupervised most of the time."

Stella shook her head and said, "Yes, I'm afraid she's gone a lot. I don't know why she's so unfriendly. She's always been like that. Try not to take it personally."

NEUF

"Never interrupt someone doing what you said couldn't be done." Amelia Earhart

XIX. Phnom Penh. Spring 1959

One Sunday afternoon Geoff and Cynthia went for a drive to the airport, the small Phnom Penh Aerodrome. Cynthia had casually suggested the airport since she wanted to research one of her ideas.

They came upon a hanger near the main terminal where they saw a young man tinkering with a small airplane. Geoff and Cynthia greeted him in French which got his attention. He looked up to see two well-dressed Americans gazing his way, with their car parked a few feet away from where he was working. They appeared to be in their late twenties or early thirties and looked as if they were going somewhere posh. Americans always looked overdressed to him anyway.

While the man's accent was clearly American, when the woman spoke, he thought she must be French. He was instantly impressed with her, not only because of her impeccable French but because of her elegance. He couldn't help scanning her body before moving back to the man's face. They both smiled kindly at him, waiting for him to respond. Wiping his hands on a rag, he walked towards them but did not extend his hand.

Not really liking Americans, his greeting was perfunctory. "Bonjour. Can I help you with something? Maybe you are lost? I am quite busy right now."

"Oh, no, we are not lost. We're interested in your little plane." The Frenchman winced. They wanted to chat. The Americans kept asking questions about the plane he was working on, did he own it, did he take people up and where did he fly. He only responded because of the woman. He liked looking at her. Then the man asked if he knew anyone who gave flying lessons. The Frenchman suddenly smiled and quickly extended his hand, introducing himself.

"Monsieur, Madame, I am Marius Gardinier, at your service." Cynthia quickly sized him up. He looked to be about her age, of moderate height, about five feet ten inches or so, strongly built with boyish, dark good looks. His manner was curt at first, but now he was all charm. She noticed the way he looked at her and she glanced at Geoff. She could tell by Geoff's suddenly hard face that he noticed, too.

The plane Marius was working on was a small American-built Cessna 140, well used, which had been in the tropics for who knows how many years. Marius assured Geoff that he would be pleased to give him flying lessons. While Geoff was thinking about how to answer, Cynthia suddenly declared, "That sounds like so much fun! I would love to learn to fly!" Marius swiveled his attention to the pretty woman and gave her his most charming smile. Cynthia's eyes were drawn to his lips before turning back to Geoff.

"What do you think, Geoff? I've got plenty of time, now." Geoff was completely nonplussed and stood there speechless for a moment.

Geoff inhaled slowly and, in a low, firm voice stated, "Well, Cynthia, that's quite an idea. But I think that we should give it more consideration before making such a big decision." Cynthia's mouth compressed in annoyance.

Making his apologies, Geoff placed his hand on Cynthia's back and steered her back to the car. Cynthia was icily silent as she climbed in. Geoff started the car and they drove away from the

hangar and out to the main road towards home.

Geoff tried to reason with her. "Cynthia, I understand you want to find an interesting activity, but there are other things you can do. I'm not impressed with this young pilot, and his plane looks decrepit. We know nothing about him, either!"

Cynthia shook her head. "But you can find out. He's French. Ask at their Embassy what they know about him." She looked at Geoff as he kept his eyes on the road ahead. She clenched her hands in her lap and said, "I don't want to do anything else. I want to fly!"

Before many days passed, they drove back to the airport to set up flying lessons for Cynthia. The young Monsieur Gardinier was delighted to have a new student, and Geoff could tell he was especially delighted that his new student was a lovely young American female.

As they drove back home, Geoff said, "Bal, I'm not sure about that Gardinier character. He's cocky and insolent. I came up against his type in the war and even in Grenoble, and I don't like it one bit. I saw the way he looked at you. Typical Frenchman."

"Don't worry! I can take care of myself. If he gets fresh or out of line with me, I'll quit. Simple as that. OK? Don't you trust me?"

"Oh, I trust you, but I don't think I can trust him! Promise me if he ever says or does anything inappropriate that you'll tell me right away. All right?"

"I will, Geoff. Don't be such a worry wart."

Cynthia was excited to begin her flying lessons. Of everything she could do in this place, this was the one thing that would allow her the independence she craved. Everything else, such as volunteering, teaching, the things the other wives did in their spare time… none of it appealed to her. Anybody could do those things.

Not everyone could learn to fly, and she was determined to fly as well as any man! Geoff had to understand that she wasn't like the other wives. She needed to accomplish something significant. She had to do this! She had to make up for the years she'd missed.

DIX

"Just watch, all of you men. I'll show you what a woman can do … I'll go across the country… I'll race to the Moon… I'll never look back." Edna Gardner Whyte, Pilot

X. Phnom Penh. May 1959

Every Saturday morning Cynthia put on khaki shorts, a sleeveless cotton blouse, and tennis shoes, and drove to the airport to meet Marius. One morning while she waited for him to arrive, a man from the French Embassy introduced himself to her. After they exchanged pleasantries, he asked her, "How well do you know Monsieur Gardinier?"

Cynthia was taken aback at the question, but she answered, "I've only recently met him. My husband arranged for me to take flying lessons from him and I just started a couple of weeks ago."

"Oh, yes, I remember now. I believe your husband asked the Embassy for a reference on Monsieur Gardinier, which we were happy to provide." He looked out at the runway in the distance. He slowly removed a cigarette from a silver case, lit it, and said, "Of course, you understand that our reference was based solely on our experience with Monsieur Gardinier during his time in Cambodia."

Cynthia, who had been searching the skies for Marius's little plane, immediately looked at the man beside her. "Oh, how

interesting. Would you mind telling me how long Monsieur Gardinier has been in Cambodia and what you know of his background in France?"

The darkly handsome man in his thirties wore sunglasses and an open-neck polo shirt over grey slacks. He turned to look at her and replied, "If I remember, I believe he came here from France around 1955 or 1956. I heard that he was part owner of a business somewhere in the south of France." He paused and in a low voice said, "Madame Stuart, I want to assure you that we have no official record of any irregularity... but I want you to know that there was a rumor that Monsieur Gardinier, or people he was close to, may have been involved in a smuggling operation." Cynthia's mouth fell open and her eyes opened wide. He continued with his story. "There was some evidence that his flying business may have been illegally transporting French goods to somewhere in North Africa."

"That's incredible! But these are just rumors, correct? What kind of goods?"

The Frenchman puffed on his cigarette and gazed around the airport. "Inconsequential items, such as liquor, you know, like brandy and champagne. But there was a hint of some connection with the Corsican mafia, which is involved in the trafficking of narcotics. The United States was very interested. Neither the US nor the French authorities were able to substantiate their suspicions; however, the authorities did have a man working undercover and, unhappily, that man disappeared."

"He disappeared? What does that mean? Was he killed or something?"

"Madame Stuart do not alarm yourself. I'm sure no one was killed, but it does seem a coincidence that just when the undercover agent was getting close to the truth of the matter, he suddenly dropped out of sight. That was several years ago, about the time that Monsieur Gardinier arrived in Cambodia."

"Why did you give him a good reference if you think him guilty of something?" Cynthia was surprised at her defensive attitude since she barely knew Marius. Her remark drew a quick look from the Frenchman. He was clearly puzzled at her demeanor.

"Madame, nothing could be proved. His record is clean and there was no reason to harm his reputation based on suspicion only. And…you must know that filling teaching positions in the local schools like the one Monsieur Gardinier has, is not so easy." He threw his cigarette down on the ground and stubbed it out with his shoe.

"Why did you tell me all this? I'm just a flying student."

"Madame, you are also the wife of a United States Foreign Service Officer. I believe there is nothing to be concerned about, but in any case, I felt you should know."

"Why didn't you tell all this to my husband?"

"Frankly, you are the one spending time with Monsieur Gardiner. We thought you may be useful."

"Do you want me to spy on him? If so, I'll tell you right now, I won't do it."

"We would never ask you to do such a thing; however, if you do find out anything that we may be interested in knowing, please call." He handed her his card. "I hope you enjoy your flying lessons, Madame Stuart. May I say it has been a pleasure to speak to an American who speaks my language so beautifully? Au revoir, Madame." He kissed her outstretched hand and walked away, just as Cynthia saw Marius's plane touch down.

Her thoughts were a jumble as she tried to sort out all that she'd heard and she briefly considered canceling the lessons. But as she walked over to where Marius parked, she changed her mind. There was no reason to cancel. If there was any real concern, the man would have told her. She convinced herself there was nothing to worry about. She smiled and waved to Marius as he began walking toward her. She would not let this 'rumor' quash her plans.

Cynthia wanted to spend as much time in the little plane as possible. During the week, when he was done for the day at the Cambodian school where he worked, Marius not only provided ground school instruction but scheduled more flight time for as long as the light lasted, usually at Cynthia's insistence. After two weeks of this schedule, Marius voiced his astonishment at her

determination.

"Are you sure you've never had a lesson before? You catch on so quickly. Frankly, I was a little worried about working with a woman. Up to now, I've only taught men or teenage boys." They were sitting at a table in the little hangar where he kept the Cessna. Several aviation instruction books and schematics were laid out with a few maps of the area scattered about.

Cynthia replied defensively, "So, Monsieur Gardinier, you don't think a woman can learn to fly? Or rather, you don't think a woman should fly, is that it?"

"Oh, no, no! That's not what I meant at all."

"Because if you can't work with a woman, I'll be happy to find someone else who can." Cynthia stood up and began to walk out to her car.

Marius ran up behind her and grabbed her arm. "Mrs. Stuart, please forgive me. I'm sorry I offended you. Please don't go."

Cynthia stopped, coolly appraised his hand on her arm, and then looked up at his face. He removed his hand and said, "I only meant to say that you are such an excellent student. You have a natural ability I rarely see! Most of my students, the men, aren't interested in the complexities of aviation like you are." He stood back and waved his hand toward the hangar. "Please, may we continue?" Cynthia walked back to the table and sat down.

"If we're going to be working together, why don't you call me Cynthia?"

Marius hurried back to the table, took his seat next to her, and said, "That would be very agreeable… Cynthia. And please, call me Marius." He smiled as he looked at her, her blue eyes engulfing him.

Cynthia caught his puppy dog look and said, "Marius, there is something you need to understand about me. I am not like most women you may have known. I am very independent, and I know what I want. I will not put up with any condescension. I do not want to be treated like a weak, silly female who can't stand on her own two feet without some man holding her up." She looked into Marius's eyes. Marius, mesmerized, could only nod. "And, if you ever put your hands on me like that again…"

"Oh, no, Cynthia, you don't need to worry. I'll never do that again."

The lessons continued and soon Marius and Cynthia found they had much in common. They both grew up in traditional Catholic homes with a domineering father who liked to drink too much. They both clashed with their families and spent much of their youth away from home. Of course, Cynthia was at a Catholic girls' school in Quebec. Marius left home when he was fourteen and drifted from place to place before going to live with an uncle who encouraged him to complete his education. It was there, in Graulhet, that he first learned to fly. It became his passion. Cynthia forgot all about what the man from the French Embassy had told her. She only thought about flying and how it was now her passion, too.

Their instructor/student relationship developed into one of friendship. "Cynthia, I'm pleased with your progress so far. You have put in a lot of hard work and it's paying off. Most of my students devote only one day a week and it takes them forever to learn the basics. But not you! You are like me. You don't let anything stand in your way or distract you from what you want. I admire your tenacity."

"Yes, maybe I am like you. I never thought of it before, but we are alike in some ways. I left my home in America to live in a strange land and take charge of my life. You did that, too, didn't you? Marius, why did you leave France?"

"It's a long story." She could tell by his sudden change in demeanor that he was not comfortable with this question.

Cynthia smiled and said, "I bet it involves a woman. Right?"

"You are partly right. There was a woman, but she meant nothing to me. Not really. She wanted more from me than I was willing to give. And my family… well, they had expectations for me that I was unwilling to fulfill. As you say, I wanted to take charge, to do things my own way." Marius smiled. "Now, enough of that. Let us talk about something else, like aviation mechanics." They both laughed.

One evening when Geoff came home from work Cynthia met

him at the door. "Marius thinks I'm ready to solo, Geoff! Isn't that incredibly exciting?"

Geoff was shocked. "My word, are you sure? You can't have enough experience to solo right now. Are you absolutely sure you're ready?"

"Of course, I'm ready! Marius says I have natural ability… I'm a quick study." She stood before him, hands on hips, flushed with happiness.

Geoff felt off balance. Thoughts tumbled through his head. The whole thing irritated him in a way he couldn't describe. "Are you sure it's safe for you to fly in that rickety plane by yourself? What if something happens to the engine and you must land somewhere out in the jungle? There are wild animals out there! Cynthia, I don't think you realize how dangerous this whole thing is."

"Oh, Geoff. Don't be so silly. I've taken off and landed many times and I know I can do this. And the plane may look rickety to you, but Marius keeps it in top condition."

"Well, I hope you're right." Geoff knew when he was defeated.

"Well, Geoff, what do you say? How about tomorrow?"

There was no stopping her. Advising caution and restraint would only set her off. Geoff soon found himself at the airport, looking on as his wife climbed into the little plane and started up the engine. With Cynthia seated as captain and Marius to her right, she quickly took off and made several circles around the airport, practicing touch-and-go landings.

The airport, surrounded by scrubby vacant land, was plagued by stray cows which wandered onto the runway. As Cynthia prepared for another practice take-off, some cows wandered into their path. Marius opened the door and jumped out to scare off the cows. Instead of getting back into the little Cessna, he closed the door, yelling at Cynthia, "Décole, décole!" It was now or never. The engine was still running and Cynthia, without another thought, powered up the engine and roared down the runway. With the cows grazing just a few feet away, she pulled back the yoke, felt the wheels leave the pavement and she was off.

It was exhilarating! Cynthia felt a rush of euphoria like she'd

never known. Even though she'd taken off many times before, this time was different. She laughed out loud with the realization that she, alone, was flying this plane, completely in charge of what happened next. "Hurrah! Look at me!" she shouted out. "There's no one to tell me what to do or how to do it!"

Once at pattern altitude, about 1500 feet, she looked around and thought about where she should go. "Wouldn't it be fun to just zip off somewhere else?" It was a wonderful feeling. Geoff and Marius were on the ground down there, looking up at her as she was looking down at them. She banked off to the right and flew until the airport was about two kilometers away. She knew Geoff and Marius would be angry, so she circled back. "Oh well." She murmured. "I guess I better stay in the pattern after all…. But next time…. Freedom!"

After circling the airport a few more times, Cynthia landed and taxied to where Marius and Geoff were waiting to congratulate her. She couldn't quit smiling. For the first time in a long time, she felt proud of herself.

It was a glorious feeling. Now, nothing would hold her back. Not Geoff, not Randy and Brian, no one!

ONZE

"And remember, no matter where you go, there you are." Earl Mac Rauch

XI. Phnom Penh. June 1959

During most of the 1950s, the US focused assistance to Cambodia in several key areas, one of which was agricultural output. To boost production, it was necessary to rebuild the infrastructure that was destroyed during WWII and afterward during the region's wars for independence. Geoff, as Agricultural Economic Advisor, contributed to the ongoing planning and needs analysis for this mission. Geoff found himself taking on more duties and frequently traveled to remote areas with his boss, Able Van Metz.

While Geoff's attention was on his mission, Cynthia devoted every spare moment to improve her flying skills. Marius and she flew together quite often. Marius told her that she still had much to learn about handling weather, difficult terrain, and navigation, as well as a basic understanding of the plane's electrical and mechanical systems. Flying in a third-world country, a pilot had to be ready for just about anything. Marius made sure she learned the complex components of aviation. And if that required more

time with her, so much the better.

"You do want to learn more about flying, don't you? Or are you satisfied with what you've learned so far?" Marius was used to students who were happy with the basics, showing no interest in anything too complex.

"Are you kidding? Of course, I want to learn more! I want to know as much as you do, Marius. I want to be as good as you are… better!"

"Bon." Marius smiled briefly and then his tone became grim. "You must be prepared for long days. You will get your hands dirty. It will be intense and challenging."

"That's just what I want!"

It was during a day-long flying trip that Marius and Cynthia experienced each other's headstrong characteristics. Marius had plotted out a trip to a jungle airstrip up north. The airstrip was short and rough, having been hacked out of the jungle. Marius wanted Cynthia to learn how to handle the plane in case she ever found herself in a situation where she was forced to land. Cynthia was flying Pilot in Command.

"I'll take the plane, Cynthia. I want to show you how to land at this airstrip I know of a few kilometers ahead." Marius reached for the yoke.

"What do you mean? What airstrip? I know how to land the plane!"

"It's not safe for you, Cynthia. I need to show you how to do it first." Marius became impatient. "Now, I have the plane." He shouted at her above the roar of the engine.

"No! You think you can tell me what to do?" Cynthia shouted back.

"Merde!" Marius reached over to pull Cynthia's hands off the yoke, but she yanked back, and the little plane began to climb. Suddenly, the stall horn sounded. "Cynthia, put the nose down! The plane is going to stall."

"Shut up, Marius! I know what to do." Cynthia took a breath and calmly pitched the nose down, finally leveling the plane to a safe altitude.

"Turn this plane around and go home." Marius, angry, decided

that he'd had enough for one day. Cynthia silently agreed and she turned the plane back toward Phnom Penh. They were quiet all the way back.

After they landed, Marius jumped out and ran around to Cynthia who was already striding away from the plane. He grabbed both her arms and turned her around to face him. "What did you think you were doing? You could have crashed the plane and killed us both. Mon Dieu, you are so stubborn!"

She shook him off and snapped, "I could say the same thing about you! You were yelling and swearing at me. Marius, why didn't you tell me about this airstrip before we left? We could have planned it out together so I would know what we were doing. But no, you have to spring it on me at the last minute like you always do and …"

"Cynthia, the next time I tell you to do something, just do it! After all, it's my plane and I'm the one with the experience!"

"That may be, but you can't talk to me like that! I don't take this from anyone, especially not you. Remember, you work for me!"

A few other pilots nearby heard the shouting and saw Marius and Cynthia, speaking in rapid French, gesturing in rage. One pilot said to another with a chuckle, "Neither one is listening to the other. No wonder they're yelling."

The yelling finally stopped, and breathing heavily, Marius and Cynthia continued to glare at each other. Their faces, still inches apart, streamed with sweat and dirt as their pounding hearts slowed to a normal rate. As Cynthia looked into Marius' eyes, she suddenly felt something in the pit of her stomach that unsettled her. Marius saw her eyes widen. Was it surprise or alarm? All Cynthia knew was that this was a feeling completely foreign to her. Looking into his face…it was almost as if she was looking at herself.

This was the first time in her life that someone stood up to her. Even her father had given in to her. When he should have confronted her about the Trust, he abdicated that responsibility to her mother. Geoff was a man who wanted calm and had proven time and again he would do anything to preserve it. She thought

Marius was the same as everyone else, flaccid and easily manipulated. But now she knew she was wrong. She saw the anger and frustration etched on Marius's face, but she also saw something else. Power. And it made her feel weak.

Slowly Marius's eyes softened. "Cynthia, I was afraid for you. Don't you understand? You are right. I should have planned it out better. It won't happen again."

Cynthia's shoulders relaxed and a smile slowly crept to her lips. "I've heard that before. But I think I understand now. Why don't we try that landing strip tomorrow?"

DOUZE

"I grew up in a confused house: too much unwanted attention or none at all." Mary Oliver

XII. Phnom Penh. September 1959

While Cynthia concentrated on her flying, her sons were adrift. She didn't notice. After all, the cook and the maid made sure there was food on the table and clean clothes to wear.

"Why can't I come home at lunch like the other kids?" Randy asked his mother one morning. "It's lonely staying at school all by myself."

"Randy, quit complaining!" Cynthia snapped. She wanted to drive out to the airport this morning and she had no time for his nonsense. "It's easier if you stay at school to have your lunch and you'll have more time to play, too."

"But all the other kids go home! There's nobody to play with!" Randy exclaimed.

"Randy, you need to get outside to catch the school van. Now, I gave my answer and that's all I have to say about it. Get going and don't forget your lunch. I have to go!"

Randy picked up his sack lunch and headed out the door. As he walked down the stairs to the courtyard, he turned back to see his mother right behind, clutching her car keys and putting on her

sunglasses. She was always going somewhere.

While he waited with the other children for the van, he looked inside his lunch sack. "Oh no, not again," he whispered. He had the same old cellophane packages of peanut butter cheese crackers and canned Vienna sausages. "Yuck. I'm so sick of cheese crackers. Why can't I come home and eat with Brian? Hahn always cooks something really good, like rice and chicken. It's not fair." Randy sighed in defeat.

One day Cynthia got a note from his teacher who asked for a conference the next afternoon. "Geoff, can you take care of this? I just don't have time."

"You don't have time? What's going on?"

"Marius wants to do some mountain flying and we'll be gone most of the day."

"Why can't you do that another time or just come home earlier?" Cynthia gave him that look he knew so well. He sighed. "Well, I guess I can go if it's absolutely necessary."

"Thanks, Geoff." She kissed him on the cheek and went to their bedroom to bathe and change for dinner.

After he met with Randy's teacher the next day, Geoff told Cynthia that Randy frequently caused problems at school. He rarely finished his work on time, he talked out of turn and disrupted the class.

"Is he failing?" Cynthia believed that Randy was overly rambunctious and something of a troublemaker. They'd received complaints from the other neighbors that he bullied the other children. But she was sure he wasn't slow.

"No, his teacher said that he's quite bright and demonstrates the ability to do excellent work. But he doesn't pay attention and picks on his classmates." Geoff thought for a moment while Cynthia flipped through a Sears catalog that had just arrived. "You know Cynthia, Randy did quite well at school back home and he never got into trouble, not like this anyway. I wonder what's behind this behavior? And, you know, I just realized that Brian's stutter isn't getting any better either. Do you think it's all connected to our move?"

"Oh, my goodness, Geoff, I doubt that. In any case, I can't

explain it. You'll have to sort it out." Cynthia turned away to check on the cook.

When Randy was called in for dinner, Geoff had his conference with his son. "Randy, I understand that you're causing problems at school."

Randy was worried. "Daddy, I'm not doing anything wrong. What did the teacher say?"

'He said you don't pay attention in class; you don't finish your work and you tease the other children. Randy, I'm extremely disappointed in you. You must do better in school and work hard. You need to be a good boy and quit picking on the other children. Remember, too, that how you behave reflects on your mother and me. Now, go to your room and think about what I've said. No supper tonight."

Brian rarely got into trouble, but even he wasn't perfect. Residents of Pochentong had storage units that were located on the roof of the complex, above the third floor. Brian walked up there by himself one day and found an open door to a storage room. He had some matches which he had brought with him from the apartment.

Brian sat down on the wood floor and began lighting one match after another. It was fascinating to strike the match, smell the whiff of sulfur, and watch the fire flame up with all the different colors. He blew it out before it got too close to his fingers. But one time, gazing at the flame, the fire started to burn his fingers and he dropped it.

Geoff got a call from an official who said he needed to go home right away because the apartments were on fire. "I can't locate your wife, sir."

The maid, who was ironing, smelled smoke and noticed that four-year-old Brian was nowhere to be found. She saw smoke billowing down from upstairs and ran up to the roof where she found Brian with matches in his hand. When she asked him what had happened, he tried to say something but was stuttering so badly she couldn't understand him.

Seeing flames in the storage unit, she dragged Brian downstairs

and began yelling for help. The Fire Department came, the fire was extinguished, and although the storage room contents were ruined, the apartments escaped harm.

Geoff and Cynthia were glad that nothing important was damaged. Randy felt lucky he was at school at the time… He couldn't be blamed. But Brian didn't get the switch and he didn't get sent to bed without supper either.

Even though Randy was disruptive at school and turning into a bully, and Brian couldn't speak and set the apartments on fire, Geoff and Cynthia told themselves that everyone was adjusting to the new routine and way of life in this tropical corner of a very foreign country. Everything was fine. Yes, everyone was adjusting quite well.

TREIZE

"Anyone who thinks sitting in church can make you a Christian must also think that sitting in a garage can make you a car." Garrison Keillor

XIII. Phnom Penh. 1959

Before they departed from the States, Geoff and Cynthia attended an Episcopal church. Randy was instructed to sit silently beside them during the worship service, standing and sitting on command. Brian was left in a separate room for younger children. They never attended Sunday School. Geoff and Cynthia weren't concerned about the boys' religious instruction; if they gave it any thought at all, they thought the boys could get all that later when they were older.

In Cambodia, missionaries from the States offered church services near the Embassy compound. Many of the other families attended these services, which were mostly Baptist or Methodist. One couple, Kevin and Stella Gleeson, who moved into the Pochentong apartments not too long after the Stuarts, sang in the choir at the missionary church. Stella approached Cynthia one time to ask if the boys would like to go to church with their family.

Cynthia was shocked at the idea and didn't hide it well. "You

go to that Baptist missionary church, don't you?" She said the word 'Baptist' as if were some heathen cult.

Stella took no notice and smiled brightly before answering. "Yes, that's right. We have Sunday School first where we all go to our own classes for Bible study. The children have some fun activities with a Bible story. Our kids love it. After that, we have worship services together. Your two can sit with our kids and the Freemans, you know, they live here, too, since Kevin and I sing in the choir. I think Randy and Brian might really enjoy it."

"Thank you, Stella, for asking, but Geoff and I prefer that our boys attend our own church with us."

"Of course, Cynthia. I understand. They're always welcome if you change your mind."

"I won't."

The missionary church might be fine for some of the Foreign Service families, but not for Geoff and Cynthia. After all, they had once attended the historic Christ Church in Alexandria, where George Washington had worshipped, as well as many subsequent US Presidents. A simple missionary church would not do. Cynthia, with her Catholic background, wasn't comfortable with the Protestants. The Episcopalians read from prayer books and knelt and stood on command like the Catholics, so, therefore, acceptable.

Geoff discovered there were a few American Episcopalians in Phnom Penh, including the Ambassador as well as several British and Australian Anglicans. They soon established regular weekly church services. Geoff and one of the British men were the lay readers who took turns conducting the services. They received printed sermons from England, and on rare occasions, had visits from the Anglican Bishop in Singapore. The typical service lasted about thirty or forty minutes, sometimes less. Geoff or the other lay reader would read the sermon text and close with readings from the prayer book. No instruction was conducted for the handful of children. There was no music or singing of hymns.

Randy and Brian were hardly thrilled about going to church every Sunday morning. Randy had to dress up in a white shirt with a clip-on bow tie, dress pants, and dress shoes that pinched

his toes. Brian, who was still little, wore short pants with a white short-sleeved dress shirt.

Cynthia said the same thing every Sunday morning. "Now boys, you must sit still and be quiet during the service. The Ambassador and his wife will be there, and your father and I want to be proud of you. After church, if you're extra good, we'll all go out for a café au lait and a croissant! Won't that be fun?"

Considering their outward, religious appearance, the Stuarts were quite relaxed about their 'faith'. The one Bible in the house sat on a shelf most of the time unused and unread. There were no bible stories before bedtime or anytime. The tiny church they attended offered no instruction for children. Prayer before meals was usually reserved for Sundays or religious holidays. They never talked about anything religious or spiritual. God's name was not said 'in vain' or mentioned in any other way.

Geoff and Cynthia were Christians because their parents were and they expected that their children would grow up to be Christians, too. It was as if they expected Randy and Brian to absorb Christianity through their pores during those half-hour readings once a week. Randy didn't know if he and Brian had been baptized as infants because no one said anything about it, and he didn't care one way or the other.

All Randy learned in church was that if he sat very still and quiet, afterward, he would get a café au lait and a croissant.

QUATORZE

"I'm not lost. I'm on my way."

XIV. Vietnam. December 1959

Geoff and Cynthia decided to go on a special vacation trip with the family for Christmas, 1959. Cynthia read about a beautiful place, Da Lat, a little resort in Vietnam that some of their embassy friends had recommended.

At 4900 feet elevation, Da Lat is in the central highlands, north of Saigon. The city was established by the French Colonial Governor-General, Paul Doumer, who was asked by French explorers to create a resort center. He agreed and the first hotel was built in 1907. The French laid out boulevards and parks, and soon villas were built, giving it a charm reminiscent of Switzerland. Urban planning included a health complex, homes, schools, and a golf course. Several Catholic boarding schools also sprang up, where privileged children were taught by Jesuit priests and nuns. In 1929 an international boarding school was established for children of Canadian and American missionaries serving in Southeast Asia.

The war against the French, led by the Vietnamese Independence League, also known as the Viet Mihn, had ended,

and they were just starting to move against the South Vietnamese. The Viet Mihn was supported by Chinese Communists to which the United States was very much opposed.

At the time, the U.S. had some military advisors in Saigon, but no ground troops had been deployed. As of late 1959 travel was not restricted between North and South Vietnam. Geoff and Cynthia felt safe in making the trip since hostilities seemed to be non-existent.

The Stuarts loaded up their little Hillman Minx with water, food, and supplies and headed off for the Cambodian-Vietnamese border driving south from Phnom Penh. After crossing the Mekong River by ferry and passing through the border customs station, the family was in Vietnam. The heat was intense, and they stopped at a little roadside store for something cold to drink.

The store wasn't much more than a shack, with a dirt floor and chickens pecking around among some rotten fruit and other refuse spilled out on the ground. But it had a refrigerator with cold beer and soda pop, which was a welcome sight, despite the chickens. The temperature was in the high 90s and the little Hillman had no air conditioning. It was a rough way to travel, especially since the humidity was almost as high as the temperature.

After enjoying their cool drinks and feeling somewhat refreshed from the heat, the family drove on to Saigon. They traveled on one of the National highways leading out of the city, looking forward to the cooler temps at their destination of Da Lat.

They drove over a small rise and there was the city of Da Lat. Geoff pulled off the road and they all crawled out of the car. "Taste that clean air, Geoff! Randy, Brian, take a deep breath. Isn't it refreshing?" Geoff thought they must present quite a picture: a young family standing by the side of the road with their heads back and their mouths open. But Cynthia felt a wave of peace and tranquility, the like of which she hadn't known for months.

Cynthia closed her eyes and stretched her arms high over her head to the sky. "Ah, isn't this wonderful? Aren't you so excited to be in this spectacular place?" She twisted her slim body and

waved her arms from side to side.

Geoff looked at her, nodded, and smiled. He stood looking around at the scenery with his hands on his hips. He was surprised to see thick evergreen forests and tall trees covering the hills of Da Lat.

Randy looked up at his mother and said, "Mommy, you're so pretty!" He thought she was beautiful and so expressive. He admired his dad, but he could be so solemn compared to her.

"What a nice compliment, Randy. I don't feel too pretty right now after riding in the car for so long. I could use a bath!"

"Oh, you're always pretty," Geoff said softly. He leaned down to the boys, poked at their chests, and said, "We could all use a bath, couldn't we, boys!" They laughed as Geoff turned to look at the view. "My goodness, this is sure different from Phnom Penh, isn't it? Not only is it cooler, but everything seems cleaner somehow… don't you think, Bal?"

"It's heavenly. I want to look for those waterfalls I heard about. There's supposed to be a hiking trail up to the top. But let's get checked into our hotel first."

They got back into the small car and drove into town to find their hotel. Their accommodations were not up to US hotel standards but to the Stuarts, the room was perfect. The rooms were in small, simple buildings, and their room included a couple of beds and a small bathroom. All quite basic, and relatively clean. But because of Da Lat's resort status, this was far better than some other places Geoff had seen on his travels in Cambodia.

Geoff had come to rate hotel rooms in 'moons' rather than 'stars' based on their quality and comfort. Since most of the hotel rooms Geoff used while traveling in Cambodia did not come close to a 'star' rating, he decided to give the accommodations a 'moon rating'. Many a place he stayed when on the road he rated as a 'half-moon'. This place in Da Lat he judged as at least a 'One Star'. Not bad at all.

After Cynthia got directions from the hotel concierge, they walked to the trailhead and hiked up a nearby mountain. Near the top they were able to look down at a beautiful band of waterfalls, with water cascading down a range of natural stairsteps on the

mountainside; the afternoon sun glinted rainbows off the water as it tumbled over the rocky ledges. The spray from the falls felt cool and refreshing. Randy climbed up further and jumped out on a small outcropping over one of the falls. "Look at me!" he yelled down to the others.

"Randy!" Geoff shouted. "What do you think you're doing? Now turn around and get back down here." Geoff shook his head and put his hand on Brian's shoulder. Brian looked up at his daddy and Geoff smiled at him.

They hiked back down to their little hotel and everyone had a bath and changed into clean clothes. They found a little outdoor café for dinner and then walked around the city, taking in the sights. It was like a dream.

Cynthia realized how much she missed this kind of environment. Now she knew why so many Embassy personnel vacationed here. Not only was the air clean and cool, but the city resembled something out of a European picture postcard. They almost forgot they were in Southeast Asia.

The family enjoyed a few days of hiking, picnicking, and sightseeing. They found the summer palace of the last King of Vietnam and enjoyed walking through the surrounding flower gardens bordered by a lush forest. They were overwhelmed by the intricacy of the newly built Lin Phuoc pagoda comprised of colorful mosaics and a massive dragon. "Look at this Randy and Brian," Geoff called out to them. "Look at this sign. It says this dragon was made with over sixteen thousand beer bottles! Think of that."

"Wow!" Randy exclaimed. "Somebody sure had to drink a lot of beer, huh, Daddy!" Everyone laughed at Randy's joke.

Their experience in Da Lat was restful and fun for everyone. Soon it was time to pack up the car and continue north.

As they drove north, they came to a river with no bridge. Their small road simply came to an abrupt halt at the river's edge. Geoff got out of the car to look around. "There must be a ferry or a bridge somewhere," Cynthia called out.

Randy climbed out of the car, scanned the river, and yelled, "Look! There's a boat over there!" Sure enough, off in the

distance, they could see a contraption that looked like it might be a single-car ferry coming their way. Poled by two strong Vietnamese boatmen, it appeared to be a simple bamboo raft on top of three boats tied together.

As it bumped up to the riverbank, Geoff approached the men to find out if this was the only way to cross the river. Using a combination of hand signals and French, Geoff decided to chance it and the men motioned for him to drive the car onto the narrow raft. Fortunately, the Hillman was small and saying a quick prayer, Geoff eased the car aboard.

When the men poled the raft off the shore and into the river, everything began to sway and rock.

"Are you sure about this?" Cynthia asked. "This thing is so flimsy we could all end up at the bottom of the river!" The boys clutched the edge of their seats. It was a nerve-wracking experience.

As they approached the opposite shore, the men told Geoff how much he owed them. It was a ridiculous amount and Geoff felt like an idiot that he had not settled this before driving onto the raft. They bickered back and forth for a few minutes and finally agreed on a figure. Geoff drove the car onto shore and, looking in the rear-view mirror, he saw the men waving and giving him big smiles. "I think that we've been taken for more than a ride," Geoff grumbled.

The next day they drove north onto a small interior road and stopped to spend the night in the village of Buon Me Thuot. There was no hotel of any kind there, but Geoff talked to a Chinese merchant who offered to rent them a room in his home.

Typical of the local Chinese, the merchant had several wives and many children. There must have been fourteen or fifteen children of all ages. Both the merchant and his number one wife were very friendly and hospitable. They invited the Stuarts to have dinner with them and introduced Randy and Brian to some of their children, who were around the same in age.

The Chinese kids motioned Brian and Randy to follow them to one of the rooms in the low, rambling house.

Brian suddenly yelped and Randy looked to where he was

pointing. "Wow, Brian! Those look like tigers!" Although these tiger cubs were only babies, they looked adult-sized to Randy and Brian. They were not in a cage or on a leash, but free to wander anywhere.

As they approached Brian and Randy, they both had the same idea - RUN! They practically knocked each other down running as fast as they could out of the house and into the safety of the car. There they sat with the windows rolled up until Geoff came out to say that the tigers were quite tame and that they were like big kittens. "Don't worry," Geoff told them. "They won't hurt you. Tell you what, I'll ask to have the cubs locked up, so they won't scare you. OK?"

The Stuarts resumed their journey the following day after Randy made sure the tiger cubs weren't running around somewhere. Their route continued north through Play Chu and then back to the coast to Qui Nho'n. By late afternoon they had reached Da Nang at the mouth of the Han River and the South China Sea.

They rarely saw any passenger cars on the small roads they traveled, but the family was fascinated with the brightly painted busses which were jam-packed with people, clinging to the roof, hanging on the sides, and out the door. "How do they get so many people on that bus, Daddy?" Randy asked. "They could fall off and get hurt."

"Don't worry, Randy," replied Geoff. "They hang on tight so they're OK."

As they slowly drove through the streets, peddlers came right up to the car trying to sell a variety of things, everything from roasted corn and plantains to hand-carved wooden elephants. Randy had once bought his mother a hand-carved elephant at one of the markets in Phnom Penh. "They have carved wooden animals here just like in Phnom Penh!" Randy exclaimed.

"Yes," Cynthia replied with a roll of her eyes. "Those carvings are all over the place, aren't they?"

When the family got settled into the hotel in Da Nang, they walked down to the ocean beach to swim. They had expected the water to be cold like the Pacific Ocean in California, but this water

was warm, almost like a bath. The boys loved how the sand squished between their toes and how the surf pulled the sand back out again. Cynthia and Geoff relaxed on the beach and watched Randy and Brian splash in the water. They enjoyed the quiet and the sound of the waves.

Cynthia's mind went back to Phnom Penh and to Marius and how important he was to her. She knew about his business in Graulhet and how he wanted to move back to France someday soon. She was thinking about living in France and flying when Geoff nudged her.

"You're a million miles away, Bal. What were you thinking about?"

"Oh, nothing. Just letting my mind drift."

After a while, the boys got tired of their playing and sat down with Geoff and Cynthia and they all watched the sunset over the city. Cynthia took off her hat, pulled out the pins holding her French twist in place, and let the breeze ruffle her long hair. Brian dug in the sand, trying to build a sandcastle with his hands.

"Come on, Randy," Geoff called out. "Let's go to those vendors up near the boardwalk and see if we can find some soft drinks."

When Geoff and Randy returned with cans of soda, Cynthia said, "Geoff, that sunset was so pretty it got me thinking. Why don't you and I come down here early tomorrow morning and watch the sunrise over the ocean? We can bring our coffee…"

"Cynthia, that sounds great, but remember we have to get back on the road tomorrow morning. We'll all need a good night's sleep."

"We don't have to wake the boys. Just you and I can ..."

"We couldn't possibly leave the boys in the hotel by themselves! We'll have other opportunities." He turned his head away from her, which was his way of saying the conversation was over. Cynthia sighed, but she wasn't defeated.

The next morning found Cynthia down at the beach, just in time to see the brilliant sunrise over the South China Sea. She sipped her coffee and dug her toes into the sand as the surf rushed over her feet and ankles. She watched the sun slowly send its

beams over the sparkling waves, finally reaching the beach where she stood. The infinite surge of the waves, first billowing in and then, just as quickly, running back to the sea, jarred something inside Cynthia. It was as if the waves were swelling to and fro from somewhere within her. Suddenly she felt a sense of longing and tears sprang to her eyes. "Why do I feel so sad? What's wrong with me?" Cynthia shook her head and wiped at the tears as she retreated from the tide.

The moment passed, and she began to walk back to the hotel. She knew Geoff would be wondering where she was about now and would be upset with her, too. "Well, that's just too bad," she thought.

QUINZE

"If it scares you, it might be a good thing to try." Seth Godin

XV. Vietnam. New Year's Eve 1959

On the last day of December 1959, the family drove south to Ngu Hanh also known as the Marble Mountains. The mountains, dotted with caves and temples, is a well-known pilgrimage site. The Huyen Khong Cave was enormous and dimly lit by shafts of sunlight coming through openings in the ceiling. The Stuarts hiked up the mountainside and then followed a narrow path to the cave entrance. Steps were carved into the rock, leading down to the cave floor where various shrines and carvings were placed along the walls.

A seated Buddha was placed prominently high up on the center wall, in a hollowed-out niche carved into the stone. Shafts of sunlight and lighted candles were everywhere, and Cynthia was struck by the similarities to somewhere she'd been before. "This place is remarkable! It makes me think of some of the cathedrals we visited in France."

"Yes, I agree," Geoff replied. "To me, it suggests the Pantheon in Rome, with the light coming in from the opening at the top of the ceiling."

"I didn't know you'd been to Rome. When were you there?" Cynthia thought she had heard all of Geoff's stories, but this was something new.

"Yes, I visited Rome and a few other places in Italy before I came to Grenoble. I must have forgotten to mention it." Geoff turned his attention to the many Vietnamese there to offer their prayers and gifts of flowers and fruit. The atmosphere was one of reverence and peace. But Cynthia wondered what other secrets Geoff may be harboring.

From the Marble Mountains, the family traveled to Nha Trang, retracing their steps along the South China Sea coast. This was the most beautiful part of the trip following curving roads through groves of coconut palms along white sandy beaches. The sun was bright, and the deep blue water sparkled beyond frothy breakers rolling up to the beaches.

The next day, January 1, 1960, Geoff and Cynthia decided to try some small back roads along the coast rather than the national highway. By noon they reached a little fishing village, Cap St. Jacques, a favorite vacation spot of the French in colonial days. The fisherman here stood in the surf and threw their long nets out into the sea.

"Isn't this picturesque, Geoff? I've never seen anything so enchanting!" Cynthia pulled out her camera equipment. "I've got to get some pictures!" The shutter clicked happily as she roamed back and forth through the seaside village.

Later they drove to Saigon where they checked into the famous Hotel Continental, which was built in 1880, and is considered the first hotel in Vietnam. The concierge directed them to a unique river boat on the Saigon River, the My Cahn Restaurant. After the heat and humidity, camp stove food, and mosquitos, the luxury of fine dining and comfortable beds was a wonderful respite for everyone.

The next morning, after café au laits, fruit, and croissants, the family walked back out to the little Hillman Minx. "Well, time to head back home." Geoff held the door open for Cynthia.

"Ah, do we have to, Dad? I don't want to go home yet!"

"Randy, I have to earn a living." Geoff's voice was stern. "We

can't wander around all the time." Cynthia wondered why Geoff was so harsh. Maybe he didn't want to go home either.

"I wish we could, just a little longer." Randy hung his head as he climbed back into the little car and squeezed in next to Brian.

A few miles out of Saigon the road crossed a small river. As Geoff drove the car onto the bridge, a noticeably young Vietnamese soldier jumped out from his sentry box into the middle of the bridge, aiming his machine gun directly at their windshield. The soldier, maybe fourteen or fifteen years old, looked as scared as they felt. Geoff slammed on the brakes and, in a low, firm voice, said, "Everyone keep quiet, no sounds. Don't move!"

Gun still drawn, the young soldier slowly approached the driver's side of the car and mumbled something in an unknown tongue. Geoff smiled nervously and showed the boy their passports, which Cynthia had at the ready. While the soldier examined the documents, Geoff repeated "American" several times, all the while smiling and nodding his head while pointing to the passports.

It was obvious this was the young soldier's first assignment to bridge duty. Geoff was certain the young boy could make out nothing more than the pictures of Cynthia and him in the passports. The soldier looked at the boys sitting in the back seat, who were sitting ramrod straight with their hands by their sides. The tension was palpable.

Finally satisfied the family was not the enemy, the soldier lowered the machine gun, handed back the passports, and waved Geoff on over the bridge. The family expelled their breath in huge relief.

"Everything is OK now, boys. Nothing to worry about." Geoff assured everyone.

"Wow, Daddy, that boy had a gun! Do you think he really could have shot us?" Randy asked. Geoff could see Brian's terrified face in the rear-view mirror.

"Oh, no! He wasn't going to do anything. He was probably ordered to stop anyone crossing that bridge. That's all."

"Are y..y..you sh..sh..sure, Da..Da..Daddy?" Brian stuttered.

"Of course! Don't worry. Nothing like that will happen again." Cynthia gave him a look that said, "I hope you're right!"

The rest of the trip was uneventful in comparison. They passed through the tiny customs post on the border, crossed the mighty Mekong River by ferry, and drove on towards Phnom Penh, thus ending an unforgettable Christmas holiday.

In the weeks following their return in January 1960, Geoff heard that the Vietnamese customs building at the border was overrun by Viet Cong guerrillas and the border officials were killed. Some of the roads the Stuarts traveled in Vietnam were cut with trenches to create ambush sites. They had just escaped being in the same regions the Viet Cong soon took over, particularly the area near Cap St. Jacques on the coast.

Geoff and Cynthia learned they were among the last Americans to drive a civilian vehicle all over South Viet Nam and back to Cambodia. After the customs people were killed, the road to Saigon was closed to vehicular traffic in and out of Cambodia.

Geoff reflected on how fortunate they had been to complete such a trip and make it back home with family and vehicle intact. He also thought about the many good people they had encountered on their journey and wondered what would become of them now. Geoff knew they wouldn't be making a trip like that again anytime soon.

It was too bad. Everyone had been happy on that trip, even Cynthia.

SEIZE

"Show class, have pride, and display character. If you do, winning takes care of itself." Bear Bryant

XVI. Phnom Penh. February 1961

As his second tour began in early 1961, Geoff, always ambitious, became more involved in the AID agricultural mission and found many opportunities to demonstrate his abilities. He was particularly skilled at project assessments and evaluations of efficacy. It was his responsibility to ensure that US funding was used appropriately and efficiently. His superiors were pleased with the well-written, comprehensive reports he produced. Geoff's goal was to be a station chief one day. At the age of 35, he felt confident he was well on his way.

Cynthia was ambitious, too. With over eighteen months of flying time, her confidence in her ability was solid. In the last year, she had become a member of the Cambodian Air Club which was directed by Marius Gardinier. She could transport passengers but was not allowed to accept payment for her services. To build up flying time she often flew friends, government officials, and others all over the country, landing on dirt runways or rough strips carved out of the jungle.

Even though she was building a good reputation, Cynthia was surprised when she was contacted by the new Ambassador who asked her to meet him the next afternoon at his office. Cynthia dressed up in her best 'calling' outfit, complete with white gloves and low-heeled pumps. She was ushered into the Ambassador's office who stood to greet her with a smile and a handshake.

"Thank you for coming Mrs. Stuart. Please, have a seat." Cynthia sat down on a small, upholstered chair across from the Ambassador's large desk. She looked at the Asian figurines on his desk, including a colorfully painted brass elephant and a carved statue of a traditional Khmer dancer. Wall art was diverse and probably quite expensive. The Ambassador, a thin, balding man in his early fifties, sat down in his large chair, put on reading glasses, and briefly glanced inside a folder laying on his desk. Taking off the glasses, he looked back up and said, "Have you ever heard of Dr. Thomas Dooley?"

Cynthia, surprised at the question, quickly responded, "Yes, I have heard of him, but I don't know much about him."

"Dr. Dooley spent several years in Southeast Asia and had ties to our USAID regional division. He founded MEDICO, the Medical International Cooperative Organization, which, under his direction, established several hospitals and clinics in remote areas." Cynthia nodded as he continued, "Dr. Dooley was a remarkable man and did much to help many people in need. I only learned in recent weeks that he passed away from cancer earlier this year."

"How awful! Did you know him personally?"

"Yes, I did have the privilege of meeting him several times. He will be greatly missed. So young, too. Only thirty-four!"

"He must have been an incredible person. But, if I may ask, Sir, what does all this have to do with me?"

"Before he died, he started a humanitarian effort in one of Cambodia's northern provinces, Kratie. The hospital is almost completed, and they need supplies and personnel. Unfortunately, there are no decent roads to that area."

"So, that's where I come in; you want me to fly to Kratie?" Cynthia smiled.

"You've got it. Now, Mrs. Stuart, there is a small landing strip, but it is very primitive. Right now, our agency is not able to provide transportation, but you…"

"Don't give it another thought. I'd love to be able to help. I'll want to fly up there on my own to check out the area and the landing strip, but if everything checks out, I will be happy to provide the needed transportation."

As soon as Cynthia could, she contacted Marius. "How would you like to fly up to Kratie?"

"Kratie! What is in Kratie?" Cynthia filled him in on the details and he immediately agreed to scout out the area with her. Marius, being the more experienced pilot, flew as Pilot In Command on the initial trip, which Cynthia readily agreed to. When they looked down on the area, she was glad Marius was flying.

The Kratie airstrip was more of a dirt trail than an airstrip. It was literally hacked out of the jungle and ran downhill to a point where trees were cut back, with the stumps left in place. There was a rocky gully on one side and other hazards surrounding the airstrip; Marius knew that a perfect landing would be necessary.

He flew over the strip a couple of times to ascertain the condition of the landing surface. Knowing this would be a short field approach, Marius lined up into the wind and lowered his speed to just above a stall. He came in nose-high position, slightly higher than normal, to create more drag. At touchdown, he hit the brakes and retarded the power. He rolled to a stop with room to spare, and there wasn't much of that.

Marius smiled and looked over at Cynthia. "Got it?"

"Got it!" They exited the plane and walked over to the construction site to introduce themselves and after getting a tour, they walked back to the plane.

Marius asked Cynthia to walk the strip. "This is important to make sure the area is clean of rocks or other debris. Look out for depressions or areas where water is standing. It may be a hole. Take as much time as you need with this. It can make all the difference." Cynthia nodded.

Before they took off, Marius and Cynthia taxied the plane as far back as they could. They stopped, got out, and manually

dragged the plane back onto a grassy area at the far end of the strip. "You will need all this space to get the plane over those tree stumps down there, especially if you have passengers or equipment. Let's get back in now, and I'll take off and land again. Then you will take the plane until you feel comfortable with the process."

"Sounds perfect. Let's do it."

Cynthia's skills were put to the test every time she traveled to Kratie. Not only was landing a challenge but taking off was hair-raising as well.

After inspecting the landing strip and dragging the plane back as far as it would go, she made sure any passengers were safely strapped inside before starting up the engine. As taught by Marius, Cynthia held the brakes on tight and powered up the engine to a screaming pitch, then released the brakes. The plane spun itself out of the grass and ran down the dirt strip, faster and faster, clawing into the air just as the tree stumps appeared dead ahead.

If she had passengers, attaining adequate speed and altitude was especially challenging. The stall horn might sound, scaring everyone except Cynthia. She dipped the nose for a moment to pick up some speed and then she added more power to skim the tops of the trees as the plane climbed, barely missing the stumps.

Cynthia loved that kind of flying and was sure to thank the Ambassador personally for the opportunity. "Thank you, Sir, for asking for me! I am so proud to be part of this humanitarian effort."

"Oh no, I am grateful to you. Until someone mentioned your name, I thought I was going to have to turn down their request for help. You have more than proved my trust in your ability. Keep up the good work."

Over the next few weeks, Cynthia made several flights carrying medical supplies and personnel to or from the new jungle hospital. She accumulated hundreds of hours.

One time Marius accompanied Cynthia on a dawn flight to Kratie. She was to transport some supplies and he helped her load

the boxes into the four-seater Cessna 180 she used for these trips. "Cynthia, after we drop off the supplies, do we have time for a stop on the way back? It's a fabulous place that I want to show you. I'll make sure we have enough fuel. What do you think?"

"Just so long as we're back before dark. Where do you want to go?"

"Angkor Wat. Do you want to go?" He smiled as she gasped in surprise.

"You know I do! I've wanted to go there ever since I heard about it. What a wonderful thought, Marius. Do we have time?"

"If we leave now, we will. So, quit talking, and let's go!" He laughed. It was all Cynthia could do not to hug Marius.

While Angkor Wat was well known in Cambodia, it was very remote, and tourists were practically non-existent. Cynthia had read everything she could about Angkor Wat, how old it was and how important it was to Cambodian history and culture. A French explorer had 'discovered' it in 1860, but unknown to the rest of the world, the temple complex was in intermittent use since the twelfth century.

After quickly off-loading the supplies at Kratie, Marius and Cynthia jumped back into the plane and Marius took the controls. Soon, they were climbing over the trees and headed northwest toward Siem Reap and Angkor Wat. After a little more than an hour and a half, Marius landed at the small dirt runway at Siem Reap. Marius hired a jeep driver to take them to Angkor Wat and soon they were on their way. The jeep was left over from the wars and it was none too clean and probably not very safe. But Cynthia didn't care.

Hanging on for dear life as they bounced over a rough track through the jungle, the driver suddenly stopped. "Why are we stopping? Is something wrong?" Cynthia looked at Marius.

"We're here!"

"Where? I don't see anything but more jungle. What's going on?"

"Come with me, Cynthia. We have to walk the rest of the way." Marius jumped out and held out his hand for Cynthia. She grabbed her canteen and, holding on to Marius, crawled out of the

jeep. He led her onto what looked like a path leading away into the jungle. Cynthia followed, enjoying every minute.

All at once, the path opened into a little clearing, and up ahead could be seen the tall spires and walls of the ancient temple of Angkor Wat. "There it is! There it is!" Cynthia literally jumped up and down as she waved her arm towards the spires in her view. They stepped further into the clearing and gasped.

It was immense; the fabulously ornate buildings covered over 400 acres. Cynthia had seen old drawings and a few photographs of the temple complex but had no idea of its actual enormity. It was hard to see how it had remained hidden for so many centuries, even in the jungle. Cynthia stood still in her tracks and gaped in awe. Everything was so quiet, too, except for the squeal of what looked like hundreds of monkeys, jumping from place to place, swinging on the vines that wrapped around and through the temple. Large stone-paved areas led to the mammoth Temple, but everything was covered in moss, and plants and even trees growing up through the cracks in the stonework.

She and Marius seemed to be completely alone. They didn't see another human being. Cynthia wondered if this was how an explorer might feel, suddenly stumbling on something fantastic and unknown. Speechless with wonder, she was unable to comprehend how such a magnificent structure could be here at all. Her senses were overwhelmed. Along with the squealing monkeys, the smell of rotting fruit on the jungle floor was incredibly strong. They wandered around the complex; Cynthia stopped and marveled from time to time at the magnificent architecture, wondering how such a thing could be constructed, and that she was witness to the largest temple structure in the world.

Marius interrupted her reverie. "We have to go soon before it gets too late." He walked over to her and pulled her close, wrapping his arms around her, and said, "Thank you for coming with me today."

"Marius, we can't..." Marius stopped her with a kiss. She knew she should push him away but found herself responding to him. She'd never been kissed like this before...at least not in a

very long time.

"Ma Cheri, I am so in love with you," he whispered as he looked into her eyes. "I know you feel the same way." His words instantly clicked a switch and she pulled back.

"We can't talk like this. Not now. We need to head back." Cynthia quickly walked away back to the jeep. Marius looked after her for a moment and then began to follow her.

DIX-SEPT

"There's a difference between playing and playing games. The former is an act of joy, the latter — an act." Vera Nazarian

XVII. Cambodia. April 1961

In their own way, both Geoff and Cynthia came to understand their relationship as not so much a marriage as an alliance. Cynthia acknowledged to herself soon after her marriage that she made a mistake. She didn't love Geoff, but they needed each other. He gave her security, a certain amount of prestige, and a life of travel and adventure. She looked good on his arm at social functions, she made sure his sons were cared for and that the household ran smoothly… with assistance from the cook and the maid, of course.

She tried to be a dutiful wife and supported him in his chosen profession. Any passion they once shared had faded to mildly pleasant moments of affection. After all, she was fond of him. Geoff never complained and seemed to accept their lackluster sex life. Cynthia never thought about it much. She intentionally decided not to think about what she may be missing.

Cynthia was always ready for anything challenging, which was one thing Geoff admired about her. They both loved to get off

the beaten path to the places that tourists avoided. That was when they were happy together. That was the key…keep moving.

So, Geoff and Cynthia determined to see as much of Cambodia as possible. They wanted to travel all over the country, whether by air or by land. Everything about the country fascinated them and they wanted to see every nook and cranny, from the beaches in the south to the thickest jungles.

In pursuit of this goal, Geoff and Cynthia loaded up the car, and with the boys in the back seat, drove down to the beach on the Gulf of Siam for a long weekend. After the good time they'd had in Vietnam at the South China Sea, Geoff thought it may be worth repeating. After finding a deserted spot, Geoff asked Randy to help him put up a small tent. Cynthia asked Brian to look for some driftwood and she gathered rocks to make a fire pit.

Later, the boys frolicked in the surf, and Cynthia and Geoff lay on a blanket spread on the sand reading and dozing. Geoff admired Cynthia in her one-piece suit. After over a year of wearing shorts and sleeveless tops, her arms and legs were tanned a golden brown. Even her brown hair was streaked blond from the sun. She wore a wide-brimmed hat while she read the latest book from home.

They hadn't said anything much to each other since they'd set up camp. Geoff leaned over, and with the waves roaring in the background, said, "Cynthia, I was thinking about that time in Da Nang when you got up early for the sunrise. I know I let you down then, but I'd like to make it up to you. We're right here with our own stretch of beach, with no one else around. How about we look for that sunrise in the morning? I'll even make the coffee."

"What are you talking about?" Cynthia, who was on her stomach, raised on her elbows and looked at Geoff. "That was over a year ago! Are you still thinking about it now?"

"I just want you to know that I think your idea was a quite romantic thought, and I regret not going to the beach with you that morning. We don't get enough of those romantic moments and I want to do better on that score. I hope you understand what

I'm trying to say." Geoff looked embarrassed as Cynthia regarded him. Her sunglasses covered her eyes and, with her mouth in a straight line, Geoff had no idea what she thought of his suggestion.

She turned her body to one side and said, "That's a very nice thought, Geoff, and if you want to have coffee and watch the sunrise in the morning, that sounds fine with me." Then she took her hat off, returned to her stomach, and lay her head down on her arms, her face turned away.

Geoff looked puzzled and confused as he watched her. Nothing more was said. He got up from the blanket and ran out to the ocean and dove into the surf. Soon he was swimming out into deep water.

The next day everyone slept in and they missed the sunrise. After breakfast, Geoff suggested they all take a walk along the shore.

Brian walked with Geoff trailing Cynthia who was a little ahead. Randy ran far down the beach. While Cynthia walked at the shoreline where the waves gently lapped her feet, Brian and Geoff walked through the dry sand.

"Daddy, it's hard t.t.to walk here," Brian said. He looked up at Geoff, as they plowed through the sand.

"I know, Brian, but it's good exercise. When you walk in deep sand like this, your legs get stronger, your heart beats a little faster and your lungs work a little harder." Randy, who had turned back, joined them in the sand.

"Yeah, Daddy, I can feel my muscles in my legs and it's hard to walk. Why don't we just walk where Mommy is? It's easy to walk down close to the water."

"Well, you can if you want to, Randy. It is easier and there's nothing wrong with it. But walking in deep sand like this makes you stronger."

Randy thought a moment and then said, "I want to be strong, so I'll walk here for a while. But when I get tired, I'll go walk with Mommy."

Cynthia heard none of this conversation. The roar of the waves drowned out everyone's voices and her thoughts were

somewhere else, anyway.

DIX-HUIT

"Sometimes I wonder if men and women really suit each other. Perhaps they should just live next door and visit now and then." Katharine Hepburn

XVIII. Cambodia. April 1961

The most interesting primitive tribes of indigenous people in Cambodia were the Khmilieu. These people had been driven deep into the remote, higher-altitude jungles by centuries of invasions of the Indo-Chinese peninsula by Indian, Chinese, and Indonesian invaders. As a result, these tribes remained totally out of the mainstream of Cambodian culture, maintaining a culture unique to themselves.

Cynthia had heard about them and wanted to visit one of their villages. She had also heard that the tribe kept elephants. Soon after their return from the beach, Cynthia brought up the subject at dinner. "Geoff, remember the Khmilieu people and their elephants? You remember, don't you, I told you about them a few months ago."

"Of course, I remember them. They're very primitive people, barely subsisting, living not much better than cavemen." Geoff frowned.

"That's right. Well, I got the name of some missionaries who work with them sometimes and I wrote to them a few weeks ago about how I wanted to visit the Khmilieu people. And I got a reply today!" She waved the envelope in Geoff's face. "They've lived up there for years, a Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Visser, I think they're Dutch, but anyway, they say we can hire elephants to take us into the jungle to see this tribe."

"My word, Cynthia, we can't ride elephants on our own. Do you really want to do that? What are you thinking of?"

"No, Geoff, don't be silly! We hire the elephants with their elephant boy drivers. Mrs. Visser says here that," Cynthia looked down to read from the letter, "'the boys will bring their elephants to our home where you can meet up with them, and then they will take you and your husband to their village.'" She looked up at Geoff with a big smile. "All by elephant! You may be able to do some hunting along the way, too. Isn't that simply perfect?"

"How long will all this take?" Geoff sounded unexcited.

"Well, it will take us two or three hours to drive to the Visser's home, and if we can leave from there right away, we should be at the village before dark. I figure we spend a night or two there and then come back home after we're dropped back off at the Visser house. Three or four days? Depending, of course, on whether or not we spot any game along the way."

Geoff nodded with resignation. "When do you want to go?"

"How about next weekend? I need to write back to Mrs. Visser to set it all up." Cynthia didn't wait for Geoff to respond but instantly went to her bedroom and returned with stationery and an envelope. Seated at the dining table, she was soon busy writing her letter to the accommodating missionaries. "I'm going on an elephant safari!" she thought to herself as she wrote. "How exciting that sounds."

Hoping Cynthia was right about the hunting opportunity, Geoff packed a hunting rifle and a shotgun with him. They also packed some rice, fruit, and camping gear. Although Geoff still wasn't sold on the scheme, he and Cynthia were ready to rough it out in the jungle. After a two-hour, early morning jeep ride north from Phnom Penh, Geoff and Cynthia were able to join the

missionaries for an early lunch and settled down to wait for the elephants to appear.

Everyone sat on the front porch with iced tea and fans. "My, it's hot today, isn't it?" Cynthia commented.

Mrs. Visser, a wiry woman in her late forties, her blond hair tied up in a messy bun, squinted her blue eyes and said, "Yes, it is muggy. It's always like this before the rains come." She fanned herself while her husband, a broad man with glasses and a small goatee, puffed on a cigar. Cynthia didn't know how anyone could smoke in this weather.

Suddenly they heard limbs breaking and the sound of brush crunching. Mr. Visser leaned forward in his chair and said, "Here they come." Cynthia jumped up from her rattan chair and walked to the edge of the porch in excited anticipation.

Then she saw the elephants emerge out of the thick forest, one walking slightly behind the other. Two young boys, clad only in loincloths, rode on the head of each, their legs hidden by the elephant's small, flapping ears. Each boy guided the animal by knocking it on one side of the head with a small stone ax. "My goodness, Geoff," Cynthia exclaimed. "Just look at them. Aren't they magnificent?" She stood in awe but quickly stepped back as the behemoths lumbered right up to the porch of the missionaries' house.

With direction from Mr. Visser, Geoff and Cynthia quickly handed up their gear to the boys who loaded it into the baskets attached to the elephants' backs. After the elephant boys showed them what to do, Cynthia and then Geoff climbed aboard. They first stepped on the front leg of the elephant as it knelt, then awkwardly scrambled up into the basket. While climbing aboard in her sneakers, shorts, and sleeveless top, Cynthia had a silly thought. "I'm sure glad the Ambassador's wife can't see me now," she said aloud.

Everyone laughed. "Me, too, Bal," responded Geoff as he tried to fold his legs in some way that would be comfortable for their journey.

After they were finally perched in their seats, Mr. Visser instructed the boys to take them to their village and then back

again in a day or two. The boys nodded and knocked the beasts in the head which caused the elephants to lurch away from the front porch. "Goodbye and thank you," called out Geoff, hanging on for dear life. "We'll see you in a couple of days." The Vissers waved goodbye and watched the Stuarts, rocking and bobbing, hanging on to whatever they could grab as the elephants plodded away.

Mr. Visser chuckled, "They'll be fine. They seem like a hardy couple. Better than some others we've seen."

"Yes, they did seem excited about their adventure. Especially her." Mrs. Visser sighed, sat down, and picked up her crochet hook.

Mr. Visser resumed his seat, lit another cigar, and picked up the latest paper from home, several weeks old. He raised his head thinking a moment and said, "They remind me of so many other Foreign Service couples we've met."

Mrs. Visser looked up from her crochet and said, "How do you mean?"

"Oh, you know the type. One is gung-ho about the local people, culture, and customs, ready to go anywhere under any conditions to see and do it all… relaxed and fearless. Then… the other is more interested in preserving the prestige of the office and enhancing opportunities for promotion. That person usually takes on an 'overseer' mentality toward the local population and is cautiously distant. Would you agree?"

"Yes, I have seen that many times. But rarely have I seen the gung-ho attitude demonstrated by the wife of such a couple." Mrs. Visser smiled. "Did you see the way she jumped up onto that elephant?"

"She certainly was eager." Mr. and Mrs. Visser chuckled and went back to their quiet occupations, sipping their iced teas.

DIX-NEUF

"When there's an elephant in the room introduce him." Randy Pausch

XIX. Northern Cambodia. April 1961

The Stuarts progressed on their 'Elephant Safari' at an incredibly slow pace. It took quite a while for them to get used to the rhythmic lumbering from side to side while holding on to their baskets. Geoff soon realized that communication with their young drivers was accomplished by a kind of sign language that wasn't always effective. "We're completely at their mercy!" Geoff voiced in frustration.

After getting whipped in the face a couple of times, they learned to watch out for overhanging branches and vines. When the elephant stepped into a ravine or gully, Cynthia and Geoff thought they would be tossed overboard for sure. Going up the other side was easier as they simply had to grab onto the front of the basket and hang on.

They learned other things about elephants, too. "These things are eating, pooping machines!" Cynthia called out. The elephants stopped at every small tree to pull off the bark or rip out a fresh, green, bushy limb with their trunks. All these goodies were

stuffed into their mouths and munched while they made their way through the jungle. All afternoon the elephants ate and pooped their way through the trees and bushes, up and down creek beds, across grassy savannahs, and back into the thick jungle.

Just before dark, they emerged into an open area where they saw a group of huts built high up on stilts. They were constructed of strong bamboo with leaves packed in the cracks. Instead of climbing down from the elephant, they stepped right from their basket onto a deck of split bamboo built to the exact height of the elephant's back. They unpacked their gear and were greeted by an old woman who invited them into her hut to spend the night.

They were shown a pile of clay at one end of the bamboo floor where they made a fire, boiled some water, and mixed in some Lipton rice mix. Soon they had a jungle meal with lots of bananas. "Do you think the water is safe?" Cynthia asked. "It was brown. Who knows what's in it…"

"What other choice do we have?" replied Geoff. "We boiled it and that's the best we can do. It should be OK."

After washing up the best they could, Geoff and Cynthia stretched out on their hard beds and hoped to make it through the night without any gastric surprises. They didn't say much to each other but drifted off to the sounds of the surrounding jungle: the occasional screech of a monkey, the chirping of cicadas and other insects, as well as several birds calling to each other in the night.

With their backs to each other, each had their own thoughts as they tried to relax and sleep. Geoff worried that he had not told anyone where to find them if they didn't get back on time. Cynthia worried that this trip only confirmed her worst fears. Geoff was a good friend, but a good husband? "I guess it depends on how you define 'good'," she whispered.

"Did you say something?" Geoff murmured.

"No, nothing, Go back to sleep." Cynthia shifted her arm under her head and closed her eyes.

The next morning, they awoke stiff and sore, but safe and sound. Their stomachs did not suffer from the suspect water and the hut didn't go up in flames from the big fire their hostess kept

burning all night.

After eating some fruit, they climbed down to greet their neighbors. A few of the villagers approached them, and taking them by the hand, gave them a tour of the village longhouse. They were small in stature, but their smiles were wide and friendly. "Geoff, it's like we stepped back in time! These people are living just as they have for thousands of years."

"Yes, it's incredible that no one has tried to help them with their standard of living. Someone needs to show them how to grow their own food." Geoff shook his head as he and Cynthia walked around the village.

"Well, of course, you would say that since that's your specialty. Maybe you could convince the agency to send you up here to do just that."

"No, that wouldn't be a good idea right now. We've got enough problems with people who want to grow their food, let alone working with people who've never even thought of it." Geoff didn't say anymore so Cynthia dropped the subject.

All the villagers' drinking cups were made from gourds that grew wild around the huts. Clothing was at a minimum for both women and men, typical of primitive people in the hot tropics. The women were bare-breasted and small children, up to the age of six or seven, went naked. The men wore loincloths and carried homemade crossbows with bamboo arrows.

It was clear the tribe subsisted on hunting and gathering. Cooking utensils were of the most primitive kind and everyone ate with their hands. The total population numbered no more than thirty or forty individuals, probably representing a few extended families. This group of natives also had at least a half dozen domesticated elephants. Cynthia walked cautiously up to a group of elephants and lightly touched their trunks, marveling at their intelligent eyes. All the while the native people hovered close by.

Although Geoff seemed saddened by the villagers living conditions, Cynthia was enchanted. "They have such a simple, pure life. They have to work hard to survive, of course, but they all seem happy and contented." It crossed Cynthia's mind that

although she had so much, more than she needed, her life seemed complicated and incomplete in comparison to the Khmilieu people.

After two nights in the village, the Stuarts boarded their jungle taxis from the upper-level platforms, the boys knocked the elephants in the head a couple of times, and they were on their way. They saw lots of monkeys and many beautiful birds, but no tigers, panthers, deer, or wild cattle, which was disappointing.

"Bringing your guns was a waste of time, Geoff," Cynthia called out as the elephants lumbered along, swaying their passengers precariously from side to side.

"I know." Geoff sullenly replied. "I don't know what I was thinking anyway. I don't think I could hit anything from here, even if I saw something to shoot!"

There was no rushing the elephants as they practically ate their way through the jungle. The jungle boys loved the beasts and took care to stop often to water and rest the elephants. It was slow going.

Geoff and Cynthia eventually arrived back at the missionaries' home. Thanking their drivers for an unforgettable trip, they rested a while before leaving again for the jeep ride back to Phnom Penh.

Randy and Brian were stretched out on the living room floor, looking at comic books when the exhausted and dirty travelers walked through the front door. The maid was preparing dinner and she was just as excited to see Geoff and Cynthia return as the boys.

Brian jumped up and wrapped his arms around his dad, who hugged him in return. Randy looked up at his mother. "You were gone a long time! I was worried that something had happened to you! I'm glad you're home!" Randy jumped up and ran to hug his mother, who grabbed his hands before he could put his arms around her.

"Randy, I'm too dirty right now. I need a bath and some clean clothes." She looked up from Randy towards the kitchen. "Something smells good!" She dropped Randy's hands and went to the kitchen and began talking to the maid. Randy's face fell as

he looked after his mother.

VINGT

"The thing women have yet to learn is nobody gives you power. You just take it." Roseanne Barr

XX. Phnom Penh. October 1961

"Geoff, I want to buy a plane!"

"You want to do what? Why?" Geoff was abashed at her declaration. Even before her answer, he knew he would eventually hand over the money and keep his mouth shut.

"I can't always get a plane at the Air Club. Marius thinks he may be able to find a good plane in France that maybe we could buy together."

"What? In France? Cynthia…"

"Marius also has a flight school in Graulhet, France, and he comes across planes for sale all the time. He's going back there soon to check on his business and to visit with relatives."

Geoff felt helpless and blindsided. "Cynthia, how much is this going to cost? I'm going to need more time to think this over."

"Well, don't take too long. Marius is leaving next week, and he needs to know if we're in or not. I think we'd be crazy not to do this! I'll talk to you more about it this evening." She leaned in, gave Geoff a peck on the cheek, and walked out the door.

A short time later at the airport, she and Marius talked over their plans. Marius suggested she fly to France with him to find their plane together.

"Marius, I can convince Geoff to buy the plane, but there is no way he will allow me to travel to France with you alone."

Marius angrily shook his head and started to speak. Cynthia quickly raised her hand. "But, Marius, listen! I may be able to come to France to look at a plane with you, but only if I bring the boys with me."

"No, ma Cherie. They'll just be in the way. No!" Marius shook his head angrily.

"That's the only way. Marius." Cynthia was firm and the look in her eye told Marius she meant it.

After much back-and-forth discussion, he finally decided to go on to France ahead of her. Once he'd taken care of business and found a plane, he'd let her know. Before leaving for France, Marius begged her once again to leave the boys at home.

"Cynthia, won't you please leave the boys here and come to France with me? I want to show you my home, to spend time with you." He clung to her hands and looked into her eyes imploringly. His voice turned husky as he gripped her hands. "You must know ma Cherie, I don't want to share you with anyone, not even your sons." Cynthia thought he looked so attractive when he was like this. Her stomach quivered and she felt herself waver. But her good sense kicked in.

"That's exactly why I need to bring the boys, Marius. Geoff will be suspicious otherwise. I can't have that. If you want me to come to France at all, this is the way it has to be!" He knew there was nothing else he could say that would change her mind.

A week later Marius sent Cynthia a telegram that he'd found a plane that would be perfect for them. It was a Rallye, a plane that was manufactured by Morane Saulnier, a French aviation company that began building planes during World War I. He told her how much her share would be, and since it was right off the assembly line, it wouldn't come cheap. Cynthia discussed it with Geoff, and he was none too pleased.

"I'm not convinced this is a good idea, Cynthia."

"Why not? I thought we'd agreed on this!"

"I'm not sure about buying anything with Gardinier, let alone something as expensive as a plane. He doesn't seem to be a stable type of person to me."

"Oh, that's just silly, Geoff. He has his own successful business, remember? I've been around him for years now and he's perfectly fine.

"And that's the other thing. You already spend too much time with him. If you own a plane together… well, I don't know if I trust him."

Cynthia laughed in response.

"I just don't like it." Geoff scowled.

"I tell you, Geoff, you're being silly. There's nothing to worry about."

"You know, Cynthia, even though you and I do things together quite often, it seems to me that you can't wait to get out of the house and go out to the airport. Am I not giving you enough attention? Do you think I'm boring? I try to give you everything you want. What more can I do?" It was true that when she was home, she seemed out of sorts and unhappy with him and the boys.

"Oh, Geoff. You're making way too much of this. It's only a plane. I'm still here. I'm still your wife. Nothing has changed." Even though Cynthia took his hand and spoke softly, she knew he was still upset.

"If you own a plane with Marius, what will keep you home then? You're gone so much now. I worry about you." Geoff held tightly to her hand, like a drowning man holding on to a life buoy.

"There's nothing to worry about. Everything will work out fine. You'll see." Cynthia smiled, but Geoff knew how the pendulum of her moods could swing.

"I want you to be happy," he said. "I only hope I won't be sorry someday." Cynthia smiled, knowing she had won.

Travel arrangements were soon in place and it wasn't long before Cynthia was on her way to France, with Randy and Brian

in tow.

They flew into Toulouse where they spent the night. The next morning, Cynthia and the boys boarded a small commuter train for the short ride to the village of Graulhet. Marius met them at the train station and drove them to a small chambre d'hôte near the tiny airport. Cynthia noticed that Gardinier barely acknowledged her sons.

After they got checked in and left the luggage in their room, Marius returned his full attention to Cynthia alone and spoke rapid French to her, telling her about the plane. He grasped her arm and led her a few feet away from the boys. It was evident that he wanted to take her to the airport immediately to see the plane he'd picked out for them to buy.

"We'll go look at the plane right now and later, I'll take you out for a beautiful French supper."

Brian asked Randy what they were saying. "Oh, he's just telling Mommy about the plane he wants to show her." Cynthia heard the comment and looked back to where the boys were waiting. There was no mistaking the scowl on Randy's face. When Marius grasped her hands, she tried to pull back.

"Marius, don't touch me that way, and keep your voice down. Randy isn't stupid! He understands French very well and I can tell he's not happy about this whole conversation."

"Who cares? He's just a kid. Nobody cares what he thinks."

"Well, I do! If you don't want me to leave right now, you must treat me with more consideration. I'm a married woman and my sons are watching us very closely." Marius reluctantly dropped her hands and stepped back, his face dark with anger.

They looked behind them to where the boys stood waiting. Brian stood placidly next to Randy in front of the little hotel and showed no emotion at all. But Randy's hands were balled into fists and his mouth was turned down into a frown. Cynthia saw that his lower lip protruded slightly, which only happened when he was angry. Even though he wasn't quite ten she knew she had to be careful. "Great," she thought. "We've barely arrived, and my son is ready to punch Marius in the face."

"OK," said Marius. "Bring the boys along to the airport, but

it's just us for dinner, right?"

"No. I can't leave them alone. They'll come with us to dinner, too."

Marius threw up his hands and yelled, "All right!" Then he leaned in and whispered, "But we will have time alone sometime soon, Cherie. We will." Cynthia looked into his eyes and was almost frightened at what she saw there. It was an unsettling feeling because she felt a sense of excitement at the same time.

Cynthia quickly turned, waved her arm toward the boys, and called out, "Come on Randy, Brian. Marius is taking us to the airport now. Let's go see the plane!"

Cynthia was ecstatic when she saw the plane sitting in front of an open hangar. She and Marius walked out to the hangar and they walked around, inspecting everything as Marius answered her excited questions. When she climbed into the cockpit, she knew this plane was perfect. "Can we take her up?"

"Of course! Let me arrange it." Marius ran back to the terminal where the boys were waiting, and ignoring them again, walked into the little office to make the call. A few minutes later, he ran back out to the plane where Cynthia was still sitting in the captain's seat. Randy watched as his mother taxied out to the runway. He went outside to see better and heard the engine begin to rev up; then the beautiful plane began its roll, faster and faster down the runway until he saw it rise into the blue sky, the sun sparkling off its wings. He followed it with his eyes as it climbed and banked away from the airport and out of sight.

After about twenty minutes, Cynthia, at last, approached the little airport and touched the plane down in a perfect landing. As the plane taxied back to the front of the hangar, Randy ran out to meet his mother. "Wow, Mommy, that was a great landing! You're such a good pilot."

"Cynthia looked down and smiled. "Thank you, Randy. Now go back to the terminal and watch out for Brian. Mr. Gardinier and I need to discuss some things." She immediately turned back to Marius and they began to examine the plane again, talking rapidly in French, while Randy walked back to the terminal.

Coming inside later, they continued laughing and talking

excitedly about the plane and how perfect it was. Cynthia hadn't felt this happy about anything in too long. It was a wonderful feeling. The prospect of owning her own plane was beyond thrilling.

After dinner, Marius drove them back to the chambre d'hôte for the night. The B&B was an ancient house, but clean with lots of ambiance. However quaint, the heating system left much to be desired. As the family settled in for the night, the boys complained about how cold they felt. Cynthia, who was also cold, eventually let the boys cuddle in with her. They threw all their blankets on her bed to keep warm.

"It's not really that cold, boys, but we're not used to this kind of weather. In Cambodia it's hot all the time, so we feel the cold more."

"This isn't that bad, I guess," Randy sleepily murmured, snuggling closer to his mother.

The next day Marius and Cynthia filled out the paperwork for the purchase of the Rallye airplane. Financial arrangements were completed and now they had to wait for the dual-ownership papers to be processed. It would be a while before the plane could be flown out of France, so Cynthia decided to take the boys home.

While he had her alone, Marius said," Cynthia, please meet me in Athens! I know a nice hotel there and we can have some time alone." Cynthia looked at him in shock.

"You must be joking, with my children with me? I just couldn't!"

"You misunderstand, ma Cherie! This hotel has, what you call, a babysitter service. Your sons will be taken care of and we can have some time together. I know you want this as much as I do." Cynthia saw the familiar look on his face, the one she'd seen frequently in the past year, ever since he kissed her at Angkor Wat. Since then, his kisses and embraces had become more urgent and his behavior toward her more dangerous. This was not a little flirtation any longer.

VINGT ET UN

"What's done is done. What matters now is what you're doing."
Rigel J. Dawson

XXI. Athens. October 1961

The next day, the Stuarts were scheduled to ride the train back to Toulouse where they would catch the plane back to Cambodia the next day. That was the plan, at least.

Before she and the boys boarded the train, Marius pulled Cynthia aside and insisted she meet him in Athens. She had never been there before, and Marius said he knew the city well and would love to show her the sights.

"Athens is a beautiful place, ma Cherie. It would be wonderful to show you all the special places that only I can show you." Cynthia looked into his eyes as he spoke. His meaning was clear, and Cynthia felt herself flush with excitement. She'd never felt this way before. He was so passionate and romantic, and they had so much in common. After ten years of marriage and motherhood, it was exciting to be pursued like this.

Cynthia hesitated a moment before answering. "Only if you promise that I will be the one to fly the Rallye back to Cambodia. I don't want you to sneak it away behind my back." She laughed

at his look which quickly turned into a big smile.

"Of course, ma Cherie! Does that mean you will see me in Athens? Be sure to call me as we planned!" She only smiled before turning around to gather her sons and their belongings to board their train.

"Come on, boys, let's go. Say goodbye to Mr. Gardinier." Randy and Brian picked up their small bags and walked to the train. Randy said a quiet "Bonjour" to Marius, and Brian, as usual, said nothing.

As she and the boys settled into their seats, Cynthia's emotions ran hot throughout her body. What harm could it do to spend a few hours with Marius in Athens? Geoff would never know. At the hotel in Toulouse that night, Cynthia tossed and turned. She awoke tired and cross. But she had a plan.

Before they boarded the plane the next morning in Toulouse, she sent a telegram to Geoff that she and the boys would stop off in Athens for a little sightseeing before heading home.

On the plane to Athens, Cynthia was awash with worry. She knew in her heart what this side trip to Athens meant. What if the boys saw something? What if Geoff found out? She argued back and forth with herself the entire trip. One moment she was sure that she could not agree to Marius's plans. Then her thoughts would turn to him and the words he spoke to her at the train. Her stomach knotted and she twisted in her seat as her anxiety increased.

Her thoughts turned to Geoff and their years together. He always treated her with kindness, but he could be so placid about everything, so calm. It drove her to distraction. She knew that there were times she acted badly, not only towards him but towards the boys, too. Most of the time she only wanted him to react, to shout! To show he cared!

If only he would stand up to her and tell her to stop acting foolishly. Her respect for Geoff was damaged the first time he let her get away with her unreasonable behavior back in Virginia. She threw dishes, slammed doors, and berated and yelled at him and Randy all the time. Now, so much had happened, any respect she had for him was all but gone. By the time the plane landed at

Athens International, she had made up her mind. She would see Marius.

During the ride from the airport, Cynthia pointed out the ancient buildings up high on a hill and dotted throughout the city. "Look, boys! There's an old temple over there. It's thousands of years old. Isn't this fascinating?" They only nodded as they stared out the windows of the taxi.

Later they boarded a bus for a tour of the historic sites of Athens. There was the Acropolis, the Parthenon, and several temples. As they hiked around the usual tourist sites with the tour guide droning on about the ancient Greeks and their architecture, Cynthia's anxiety returned.

She kept looking around, nervously scanning the crowds of tourists, half expecting Marius to appear. She knew that prospect was very remote, but she couldn't shake the uncomfortable feeling of being watched. It would be just like him to sneak up on her. He had a penchant for popping up when she was preparing to fly dignitaries or tourists somewhere. She got the feeling that he wanted to examine who would be on the trip, especially the men.

The Athens tour group stopped at a restaurant for a late Greek lunch which they all enjoyed. Cynthia ordered a couple of sandwiches and some baklava to take back to the hotel. The bus stopped for an hour and they picked up some souvenirs and picture postcards before they finally arrived back at the hotel tired from their long day. Before going up to their room, Cynthia stepped into the bar and asked that two soft drinks be delivered to their room in half an hour. She was tempted to get a drink for herself, but memories of her father's excuses for drinking stopped her.

Upon entering their room, Brian collapsed on the bed and flung out his arms with a heavy sigh. Randy plopped down into a chair next to the radio and began to fiddle with it, hoping to find something interesting. "Wow, Mommy, this has been a long day!" Randy said as Cynthia opened her suitcase and pulled out her toiletry bag, a dress, and a pair of shoes.

"Yes, Randy, it has been a long day, flying from France and walking all over Athens… I know you and Brian must be tired."

She put another suitcase on her bed, opened it up, and took out the boys' pajamas and some comic books she had packed. "Why don't you two put on your pajamas and get ready for bed? I'm going to take a bath right now, so I want you changed by the time I come out…OK?"

Cynthia luxuriated in the warm water, thinking about the evening ahead with Marius. Possible repercussions did not enter her thoughts. She only thought about Marius and her long-denied desire. She didn't think about the blatant betrayal of her marriage vows, she did not think of how her actions could impact her sons and her husband. Her thoughts only reinforced what she wanted to believe. This was her life, and she had a right to be fulfilled and do whatever the hell made her happy.

Cynthia came out of the bathroom, fresh and glowing from her bath. She had rearranged her French twist, applied fresh lipstick, and put on the dress she had hung up earlier. After slipping on her low-heeled pumps, she set out the sandwiches and baklava on a small end table. A knock on the door brought the two soft drinks she had ordered earlier.

She turned to her sons, sitting cross-legged on the bed, flipping through the comic books. "I see you found the VOA channel, Randy. Just like home, huh?"

"Yeah, they had the news on a little while ago… now, just some music. Maybe they'll have a mystery on later."

Cynthia picked up her room key and her handbag and said, "Boys, I'm going out for dinner and some shopping."

Randy protested, "Mommy, no! Can't we go with you? We don't want you to leave now, do we, Brian." Brian shook his head.

"Now, enough of that! It's too late for you to go out and I know you're tired anyway. There are sandwiches, soft drinks, and some baklava if you get hungry. You'll be just fine. Will you be good boys?" She looked sternly at Brian and then Randy until each reluctantly nodded his head.

"I might be late, so I want you in bed with the lights off by nine o'clock. Keep the door locked and don't let anyone in. Leave the bathroom light on so I can see when I come in. Now be good boys and I'll be back later." And then, in her firm mother tone,

"Randy, take care of Brian. I'm depending on you." She opened the door and taking one last look at her sons, closed it, locking the door behind her.

Cynthia climbed the one flight of stairs to Marius's room. She had decided against the elevator because more people used it. She walked down the hall, hearing her steps echo unnervingly. She stopped at his door, took a deep breath, and hesitantly raised her fist to knock. She looked up and down the hallway, and after another deep breath, gently rapped the door. The door immediately swung open, and Marius, bare-chested, filled the space. "You're here, at last," he breathed as he reached for her hand and pulled her inside closing the door behind her.

Several hours later, Cynthia gently opened the door to her hotel room. Randy moaned in his sleep when the light from the hallway beamed onto the bed where he and Brian were sleeping. Cynthia slipped in quietly. As Randy turned over, Cynthia quickly entered the bathroom and closed the door.

In the bathroom's harsh light, she looked at herself in the mirror. She had pulled her long hair back from her face, and it now hung limply down her back. She gingerly touched her swollen and sore lips. Her face was flushed and as she removed her wrinkled dress, she saw small bruises on her thighs and arms. She slipped on her pajamas and looked into the mirror again. She suddenly smiled and whispered, "I'll have to keep those bruises covered for a while…but I'm not sorry, not one bit."

The next afternoon, Cynthia took Randy and Brian to the airport to continue their trip back to Cambodia. The tickets were purchased, and the baggage checked. They found seats near their gate and sat down to wait.

Randy suddenly nudged Cynthia and said, "Mommy, why is Gardinier following us?"

Startled, Cynthia jerked and snapped at Randy, "What are you talking about?" Randy pointed to a man across the waiting room, who was quickly walking away. "Isn't that Mr. Gardinier? Is he following us? Why is he here?"

Cynthia calmed herself and said, "Why, my goodness, that does look like Mr. Gardinier! He must be taking the same plane as us. Of course, he isn't following us, Randy. Don't be silly. He must be on his way home, just like us." With a pained expression, Marius turned briefly back in their direction. Cynthia met his eyes.

She hesitantly waved a reluctant Marius over to where they were sitting and asked, "Mr. Gardinier, are you changing planes here?" He looked confused but slowly nodded. Cynthia smiled and said, "What a coincidence that we're on the same flight! The boys and I arrived yesterday to do some sightseeing before going home. Athens is such a marvelous city."

This exchange took place in French and Cynthia explained it to Brian. "Mr. Gardinier has just arrived from France, and now he will be on the same plane as us! Isn't that funny?"

They chatted a little about the Rallye airplane purchased in France and when it would be ready to transport to Cambodia. She told Marius that she and Geoff would probably return to France soon to fly it back to Phnom Penh. After a while, Marius excused himself to buy a coffee before boarding the plane. He sat several rows behind them.

Somewhere between Athens and Phnom Penh, Marius got off the plane and Randy did not see him again for a long time.

VINGT-DEUX

"Having the critics praise you is like having the hangman say you've got a pretty neck." Eli Wallach

XXII. Phnom Penh. New Year's Day 1962

Once a year the Embassy threw a party. Everyone connected to the Embassy was invited, FSOs, staff, and their families. The meat was provided for burgers plus all the fixings. Families were encouraged to bring side dishes and desserts, lawn chairs, and if they could get them, coolers full of American soft drinks. Some brought stronger drinks. This year, a Chinese Junk had been rented for the party. The junk, moored at a dock in the Mekong, was huge and could easily accommodate everyone who wanted to come. Of course, everyone came since the Ambassador and his wife were officially hosting.

The Stuarts looked forward to the party. This was the one time a year when strict protocol was suspended in favor of having a fun time. But even so, everyone knew to be on their best behavior. The Ambassador, dressed in his best Hawaiian shirt, white pants, and deck shoes, could and would observe the men and their families; he noticed if a wife's bathing suit was too revealing or if she drank too much, or if children were

disrespectful and rude.

On the day of the party, Cynthia stood before the mirror in her bedroom, holding up an outfit. It had arrived in their Christmas order and she hadn't worn it yet. She turned to Geoff, sitting on the edge of the bed, putting on his sneakers. "What do you think, Geoff?" He saw her holding up a pair of pale green capris and a matching, sleeveless top with white trim. "Or should I wear my new dress?" She put the first outfit down on the bed and held up a spaghetti strap blue flowered dress.

"I don't know. Those pants aren't too tight, are they? And how do you keep that dress up? With those little strings?"

"Don't be silly, Geoff. These capris are just like what everyone else wears. And those 'strings' are called spaghetti straps. It's a very popular style right now. I saw a picture of Marilyn Monroe wearing one."

"I think you better go with the pants set. I haven't seen anyone from around here wearing those spaghetti strap dresses, and you're no Marilyn Monroe."

"Well, thanks very much, Geoff!" Cynthia huffed.

"No, I only meant you can't be a trendsetter here like Marilyn Monroe. Personally, I think you'd look very nice in the dress, but you know how things are here…"

"I know, I know, I get it!" Cynthia hung the dress back up in the closet. "It's too bad because I think I look pretty darn good in that dress. Maybe I'll get a chance to wear it some other time. The Ambassador and his wife are so conservative."

When the Stuarts arrived at the dock, Randy helped Geoff carry the cooler on board the junk and place it with the others lined up near the long tables set up for the food. Cynthia set out a plate of sliced mango and a bowl of sticky rice her cook had prepared. Everything looked under control. Cynthia had learned that if she arrived a little later, there wouldn't be much left to do. Geoff excused himself to go help the men at the grills with the burgers. Randy and Brian, dressed in their bathing suits, ran off toward the stern where most of the other kids had already gathered for swimming.

Cynthia pulled out a soft drink from one of the coolers and

went to find a chair near the railing facing the river. As she wandered among clusters of people, several women called out greetings to her and she waved and smiled but kept on walking.

She approached a group gathered around the new ambassador's wife. Cynthia knew she must stop and make a point of speaking to her. She stood silently waiting for a break in the conversation. The Ambassador's wife was speaking, holding court. As she glanced around, her eyes rested on Cynthia. "Mrs. Stuart! I'm so happy to see you here today. I haven't had a chance to offer my congratulations!"

Everyone's eyes suddenly turned in Cynthia's direction. Cynthia, surprised, had no idea what she was talking about. "I'm sorry, Ma'am, congratulations? And please, call me Cynthia."

"Oh, how modest you are, Cynthia. I've heard all about you!" She turned to everyone standing in rapt attention and said, "This young woman, single-handedly, saved a mission hospital in northern Cambodia, near the Laos border!" Everyone's mouths dropped open.

Cynthia started to speak, but the Ambassador's wife carried on. "You've all heard of Dr. Thomas Dooley, that great humanitarian who worked for many years here and in other parts of Southeast Asia? One of his hospitals was on the brink of failure because it couldn't get the supplies it needed to open. It is so remote that there are no decent roads to that location. But this brave woman," she pointed back to Cynthia, "offered to fly equipment, medical supplies, and even necessary personnel up to the hospital, usually all by herself. And, from what my husband told me, it's no small feat! The airstrip is just a dirt clearing in the middle of the jungle." Everyone looked at Cynthia in awe.

"It was my pleasure to help with such an important venture. I love to fly and I saw it as a challenge."

"Well, my dear, you certainly demonstrated great skill and dedication. So, I want to say again, congratulations on a job well done!" She reached for Cynthia's hand and shook it heartily. Cynthia looked around and saw that many more had joined the group, who all began offering their congratulations. After a few moments, most of the crowd drifted away, leaving the

Ambassador's wife standing alone with Cynthia.

"I want you to know, privately, that the Ambassador has taken special note of your willingness to accept such a dangerous, important task. You are a credit to your husband and I'm sure he is proud of you, as well. As an FSO he is lucky to have someone like you by his side. You are a true asset to his career. And speaking as a woman, I am proud that you have clearly demonstrated the worth and value of what women are capable of." She smiled and patted Cynthia's hand.

"Thank you so much for your kind words," Cynthia said. "You can't know how much they mean to me." Cynthia beamed with pride.

"Well, I must be greeting the others. Have a good time at our party." She smiled again and walked away.

Cynthia felt overwhelmed with emotion. She had never in her life received such praise and affirmation. This was something she'd been longing for, hoping for her entire life, to be part of something important and to be held in high esteem by people like the Ambassador and his wife. Cynthia had to admit that when the Ambassador had asked her to help transport the supplies up to the hospital, she only thought of it as an opportunity to challenge her flying skills and to go somewhere new and different. Obviously, it was far more important than she realized.

"There you are!" Geoff called out as he approached Cynthia with a couple of plates stacked high with food. "Can you find us a seat somewhere?"

"Sure, I think there's a couple over there." Cynthia pointed toward the railing. Geoff caught up with her just as she sat down in the lawn chair. He handed over her plate and sat down next to her. Just then, Randy and Brian ran up, dripping wet from their swim.

"Where's the food? I'm starving!"

"You're always starving, Randy," Geoff laughed. "Go back toward where we came onboard. You remember, don't you? You can't miss it. The plates are on the end of one of the tables." The boys raced away.

"You looked lost in thought when I found you," Geoff said.

"You were all alone, too. Haven't you talked to anyone?"

"Of course, I have. I just had a long conversation with the Ambassador's wife. I've spoken to quite a few others, too."

"Really?" Geoff exclaimed. "What were you talking to the Ambassador's wife about?"

"Oh, you know, just chit-chat." She picked up her burger and took a big bite. After a moment she said, "You men did a good job, Geoff. This burger is delicious!"

"Yes, they are good. It helps when you can get decent ground beef." Cynthia nodded as she took another bite. They both gazed out at the river, eating their lunch quietly, keeping any thoughts to themselves.

VINGT-TROIS

"Some of us are becoming the men we wanted to marry." Gloria Steinem

XXIII. Pochentong, Phnom Penh. February 1962

The Christmas gifts that arrived from Sears the prior October included bicycles for Randy and Brian. With all the excitement of traveling to France to buy a plane and bring it back to Cambodia, the bicycles remained in their boxes, awaiting assembly. Cynthia had cut out pictures from the catalog and placed them under the tree inside envelopes addressed to each boy.

At dinner one evening Randy asked the big question that he and Brian wanted to be answered. "Daddy, when do you think you'll be able to put our bicycles together?"

"Randy, you know how busy your father is. He doesn't get much time at home as it is." Cynthia snapped. Geoff looked sharply at her and set down his fork and thought a moment.

"You know, Randy, I just realized how long it's been, and you and Brian have been very patient. I think it's time you get your bicycles!" He smiled at his sons. "I tell you what… if you two are willing to help, maybe I can get started on them this weekend!"

"Wow, Daddy! That will be great. I'd love to help, and I know

Brian would too." Brian affirmed with a vigorous nod of his head. Geoff's smile faded when he looked at Cynthia across the table. She didn't seem pleased.

"Of course, dear, it's up to you. We'll have to use the living room since we have no other workspace, but we'll keep everything picked up so it's not in your way. And I'll try to finish everything as soon as possible. Will that work for you?"

Cynthia looked at her husband and then at her sons. They all peered at her in wary expectation. A fleeting thought crossed her mind that they were afraid of her. Their posture demonstrated a servile attitude with hunched shoulders and bent heads. How did this happen? It didn't occur to her that in pursuing her own activities she had fostered an authoritarian environment. She believed she was entitled to her 'dreams' and in the process, she had shoved her husband's and sons' interests and needs aside as unimportant. She dismissed the fleeting thought as complete nonsense.

Cynthia nodded and said, "OK, just as long as you don't clutter up my living room. I don't want to be tripping over bicycle parts every time I walk through there."

"Don't worry, Mommy," beamed Randy. "We'll have it finished in no time and Brian and me will pick up everything."

Cynthia thought the bike construction would take a day or two at the most. She tried to be patient with the mess in her living room since she knew it was only temporary. But it was still a nuisance and as the project dragged on from one week to the next, her patience began to wear thin.

One Saturday morning, Cynthia reached her breaking point. "Are you almost done with these bikes, Geoff?" She waved her arm at the unfinished bicycles leaning against a corner in the living room with miscellaneous parts stacked nearby. "It's been over two weeks and my living room looks like a junk store!"

Geoff responded, "They're almost done, Bal. I only need to attach the training wheels to Brian's bike. Randy's needs the seat attached and some reflectors screwed on. I'll have everything wrapped up today, I promise!"

"I don't care what you have to do, just get it done!" Cynthia

exclaimed in exasperation as she walked to the door. She gave the room another disgusted glance and opened the door to go out.

Geoff called out to her, "Where are you going now?"

"Just out to the airport. I'll be back this afternoon sometime." She heard Geoff swear under his breath but chose to ignore it as she closed the door behind her.

Geoff look at the closed door and soon heard the car start up downstairs. He rose from his chair and walked into the kitchen. "I'm going out for a while, so please make sure the boys have some lunch," he told the cook.

"Where can you be reached, sir?"

"I'll be at Le Club Nautique." He turned away and in a moment the cook heard the door close again. She shook her head and went back to washing some vegetables.

When Cynthia arrived at the airport, she found Marius with his head under the cowling of their plane. "What's up, Marius?" Cynthia stood beside him to see what he was doing.

"Nothing much. The engine has over one hundred hours and it's time to do a tune-up."

"Show me! I want to learn how to maintain everything. Tell me what you're doing and show me how so I can do it the next time."

Marius straightened up and turned to look at Cynthia with a laugh. "What are you laughing at?" Cynthia felt insulted. "Don't you think I can be a mechanic?"

Marius threw his hands up in self-defense. "No, no, Cynthia. I'm not laughing at you. I'm laughing at myself for underestimating you. When I first met you, I thought you were a pretty, bored American woman who wanted to be entertained." Cynthia glared at him, her hands on her hips. Marius put his hand on her shoulder and said, "I learned what an amazing woman you really are. I'm serious, Cherie. You can do anything. I'll show you everything I know. You'll probably be better at it than me!" He laughed again as Cynthia started to laugh with him.

After a day of pulling out parts and putting them back again, Cynthia was tired, dirty, and happy with what she'd learned. She

blew Marius a kiss with a little wave of her hand as she walked to her car to drive home. Marius caught up to her and playfully caught her hand and said, "Come away with me! I will take you to Paris and treat you like a queen! We will be so happy."

"Don't be foolish, Marius. I'm very happy with the wonderful day we had today. Please don't spoil it. I'll see you soon!" Cynthia pulled her hand away with a smile. She climbed into the car and started the engine.

"But ma Cheri," he called after her, 'you know we are tres bien ensembles!" As she drove away with another wave, Cynthia considered how Marius made her feel so wanted, so loved, and cherished. He not only treated her as his equal but he believed in her. And unlike Geoff, he wasn't afraid to tell her the truth, even when it hurt. She truly valued his honesty.

She thought, too, about what Marius had said about going away with him to Paris. She sighed with pleasure at the idea. To finally live out her dream from so long ago…. As she parked the car and began to climb the stairs to the apartment, she shook her head to clear away the fantasy.

VINGT-QUATRE

"The best way to keep one's word is not to give it." Napoleon Bonaparte

XXIV. Pochentong, Phnom Penh. February 1962

As she climbed the stairs to her front door, Cynthia hummed a tune from *Camelot*. Geoff had recently acquired the soundtrack from the popular Broadway musical and they had played it many times. It had become a favorite while enjoying cocktails before dinner. The tune she hummed was *'How to Handle a Woman'* which was sung by Richard Burton. She loved all the songs but this one continued to stick in her head: 'The way to handle a woman is to love her...simply love her... Merely love her...love her....' Enchanting. She smiled as she reached the door and turned the knob.

"Damn it!" Cynthia stood inside the door and saw Randy and Geoff both on the floor beside a bicycle. Brian's bicycle was propped up against the wall nearby along with various parts and tools scattered about the room.

Geoff looked up and said, "Hello Bal. Now don't worry about these things. We're almost finished. Everything will be cleaned up and put away in no time."

"Geoff, you promised! What have you been doing all day? You promised you'd be finished by now! I should have known better than to trust you."

Geoff rose, but before he could respond Cynthia took one step and grabbed Randy's bicycle, carried it out the open door, and threw it over the railing where it crashed loudly on the pavement below. She immediately turned back to snatch up Brian's bicycle and pushed it down the stairs, training wheels and all.

Brian, after hearing his mother's voice, ran into the living room just in time to witness the carnage. Randy still sat on the floor watching her, too stunned to move or say anything. Geoff stood nearby frozen in shock.

Cynthia turned back to face her family, all staring at her. Brian began to wail. Without saying another word, Cynthia walked to her bedroom and slammed the door.

Geoff silently walked over to Brian and knelt down to comfort him. "Don't worry, Brian. Everything will be fine. Now stop crying." He put his arms around Brian and gently patted his back.

Randy asked, "Dad, why didn't you stop her? Now our new bikes are ruined. Why did you let her do that?" Tears began to stream down his face.

Geoff did not respond but continued to pat Brian's back, while he stared at the open door. Finally, he looked at Randy and said, "Why don't you take these things to your room and I'll call you when dinner's ready."

Randy wiped his face and said, "Can I go outside?" Geoff slowly nodded and Randy bolted out the door. Geoff heard his son's feet thump down the stairs and away from the crumpled bikes.

An hour later Geoff went out to find Randy after clearing the destroyed bicycles away out of sight. As he and Randy walked back in the humid twilight, Geoff said nothing about the incident. It was as if nothing had happened.

VINGT-CINQ

"Each of us has one past, but there are many futures." Greg Lafleur

XXV. Phnom Penh. March 1962

Not too long after the bicycle incident, Cynthia decided she wanted to move. Every time she walked down those stairs, she saw visions of the crumpled bicycles, her sons' Christmas gifts, in her mind. She wanted to rid herself of that image, so moving to a new place seemed completely reasonable. Of course, that wasn't the reason she gave to Geoff. "We need more space. You know how much I enjoy photography and I would like to set up a darkroom."

"Can't you use the storage space upstairs on the roof?"

"Don't be silly, Geoff. We have our luggage and other things up there. There's no room. And that's not the only concern. I think the children here have been a bad influence on Randy. You know he never got into trouble before we moved here." She also wanted to get away from the prying eyes and questions of the nosy neighbors.

Geoff returned to his book and said, "Ok. I'll check with the Embassy to see if any other housing is available."

After some inquiries, Geoff found a two-story duplex on the other side of the city in a residential area. The house was owned by the Embassy and it was available. It was a back-to-back duplex, with the second unit at the rear. Each unit's front entrance was opposite the other, facing separate streets, so they would rarely see their neighbors. The house was a little larger than their apartment, with a covered carport on the side and a good-sized storage area. After showing it to Cynthia she said there would be plenty of space for her darkroom. She approved.

There were some minor drawbacks. For one thing, Randy's school would no longer provide transportation. Geoff, who usually walked to his office, would now have to use his little Vespa to get to work. "Little inconveniences, Geoff. We can work something out." Cynthia was delighted to be far away from Pochentong. "Why don't we have Randy use a cyclo to get to school?"

"What? Cynthia, I don't think you realize what you're suggesting. He would have to ride across the city in heavy traffic twice a day. Those things are precarious and he could get hurt. He would be afraid the whole time."

"Nonsense! Take my word for it. Randy will love it."

Geoff struck a deal with a cyclo driver to pick up Randy each day at the house and take him to school. The driver would return in the afternoon to take him home again. Geoff reasoned that Randy's French was good and that he was used to taking care of himself. When he talked with the cyclo driver, Geoff called Randy outside. "Randy, you've seen a cyclo before, right?"

"Sure, I've seen them all over the place."

"Ok, that's fine. After we move, you'll have to ride on one to school and back every day. You'll sit on this little bench in front of the driver and you'll have to hold on real tight so you won't fall off. You won't be scared, will you?"

"Oh, no! I'll love it! It will be so much fun. Wait 'til the other kids see me. Can I try it now?" Geoff watched as Randy hopped up on the seat and the driver spun off down the street for a quick ride.

Geoff could see Randy's smile and knew that Cynthia was

right. Randy loved it. "Just like his mother," Geoff murmured.

Soon the Stuarts were moved into the new house and a new routine was established. Randy rode off each morning on the cyclo and Geoff left for work on his Vespa, rain or shine. Sometimes he took Brian to school seated behind him. Sometimes, depending on her schedule or the weather, Cynthia dropped Brian off at school.

As time went by, Cynthia and Geoff's relationship grew more disconnected. Geoff was away from home often, traveling throughout the country, monitoring ongoing projects, or hunting with his friends. Cynthia never complained. Flying, photography, and Marius consumed her time, usually in that order.

One morning after breakfast, Geoff waited a little longer than usual before he and Brian left. Cynthia, dressed in grey slacks and a turquoise sleeveless blouse, walked into the kitchen and saw him still sitting at the breakfast table. "Why are you still here? Brian will be late for school."

Geoff looked her up and down and said, "You look nice today. Anything special going on? Oh, isn't that a new bracelet? I don't think I've ever seen that before."

Cynthia had not expected to see him and quickly tried to cover her surprise. "Oh no, nothing special. I'm just going to the Bi-National Center this morning." She looked at the bracelet that Marius had given her. "Don't you remember, Geoff? I bought this the last time we were in Hong Kong. Now, what about you? Brian will be late for school if you don't leave right now."

Geoff looked at the bracelet and back at her stern face and said, "It won't hurt if he's a little late today. We always get there at least a half-hour early most of the time. I just wanted to run an idea by you. Can you give me a minute of your time, please?"

"You don't have to be sarcastic! Of course, I have a minute! I'm in no rush." She poured herself a cup of coffee and sat down at the kitchen table. Rolling her eyes, she asked, "What's on your mind?"

Geoff studied her a moment. "What do you think of taking the boys to a movie this weekend? We haven't done anything with

them in a long time."

There was a movie theater in the old French district that showed American movies dubbed in French. They had seen an old John Wayne film there that everyone had enjoyed, especially Randy.

"Oh no, Geoff. I just can't this weekend. Marius says I need some practice with mountainous navigation and we've planned some day trips for this Saturday and Sunday."

"Haven't you already done plenty of that kind of thing? Won't you please consider putting it off? We need to spend more time with the boys. There's a picture playing that I think would be entertaining."

"I'm sorry, but I just can't. Marius has already filed the flight plans. And besides, Brian can't understand those movies very well and he gets fidgety. And Randy… well, you know how he can be. Remember how he was the last time? He wouldn't keep quiet during the movie. He was either providing a blow-by-blow narrative for Brian or reacting to everything with loud gasps or 'oohs' or something. It's annoying!"

"My word, Cynthia. It's not all that bad. He's just a boy and very enthusiastic. The only one he bothers is you."

"Well, Geoff, I guess you're right about that. He does bother me… all the time."

"But why?"

"I don't know. I only know that he does."

"I'm beginning to wonder if this is just an excuse for you to do what you want, rather than spend time with your own family. I try to do everything I know to make you happy… we go to the club, we travel, I bought that damn plane! No matter what I do, it seems you can hardly wait to get away from all of us. What's wrong? You always seem so unhappy."

"Don't be silly," she laughed. "I'm not unhappy. What a crazy thing to say. How can you think such a thing?" She took a sip from her coffee, set down her cup, and stood up, pushing her chair back. "Now I have things to do." She grabbed her car keys and her sunglasses and practically ran out the door.

Geoff sat there a moment until he heard the familiar sound of

the car's engine starting up and then fading away as his wife backed down the driveway. He slowly stood up and called out, "Brian, are you ready? We need to go now."

VINGT-SIX

"We feel free when we escape – even if it be from the frying pan to the fire." Eric Hoffer

XXVI. Sokha Beach, Gulf of Thailand. June 1962

As soon as school was over for the summer, Cynthia decided to take the boys camping at Sokha Beach on the Cambodian coast of what used to be called the Gulf of Siam. The family had been there before and it was practically deserted. She loved it.

Things were getting complicated at the Embassy; the Communists were making greater inroads into Vietnam resulting in pressure on the Cambodian government. Geoff couldn't take time off during the week but decided he could take the family down and help set everything up over the weekend. Cynthia wanted to stay for at least ten days, so he planned to return the following weekend to pack up for the return trip to Phnom Penh.

Geoff packed two tents: a small pup tent just big enough for Brian and Randy to use and a little larger one for him and Cynthia. He also packed a small propane camp stove and extra propane canisters. Geoff had installed a luggage rack on top of the little car to which he added two five-gallon plastic jugs of water and whatever else couldn't fit in the trunk. Cynthia took care of the

meal planning with canned or dry ingredients that only needed a little water and heat to cook. She prepared some marinara sauce which she sealed in large canning jars that she planned to use with pasta or rice. There was also plenty of fresh fruit. She had snagged some French bread and fresh eggs at the commissary that she planned to use for breakfast.

Cynthia was sure to pack a selection of books that she'd borrowed from the Embassy library. She couldn't wait to get into Youngblood Hawk by Herman Wouk and Irving Wallace's The Prize. She yearned to get out away from everything and to relax on the beach with nothing to do. Lately, she had caught herself snapping at Randy and Geoff more than usual and even little Brian had felt the bite of her tongue. "I just need a vacation," she told herself. Lying on a beach with a good book, listening to the surf, and dozing on the sand would make everything better.

Early Saturday morning, the Stuarts drove to the beach, about a two-hour drive from Phnom Penh. "I hope nobody else has discovered this place since the last time we were here," Geoff said to Cynthia. "I'd hate to see that beautiful beach ruined with a bunch of tourists."

"I agree. Look what's been happening to Angkor Wat!" Cynthia shook her head. "I'm looking forward to the peace and quiet."

As the car approached the beach, Cynthia sighed with happiness. There was 'their' beach, still pristine with the blue sky, the sparkling surf, and a lovely expanse of white sand, completely devoid of human contact. Tropical forest bordered the beach as far as the eye could see with the closest habitation miles away.

After parking the car, everyone went into action, pulling out bedding and cartons of supplies. Randy set up the camp stove and Brian looked for rocks for a campfire ring while Cynthia arranged her supplies. Soon the tents were in place and the campsite was in order.

Everyone kicked off their shoes and dug toes into the warm sand. It was a welcoming feeling. Randy and Brian ran off to explore the beach. Geoff set out a couple of small beach chairs and placed an umbrella nearby. He asked Cynthia, "Would you

like some water?"

"Sure, that would be great." Cynthia pulled out one of her books, draped a towel over the beach chair, and sat down. By the time Geoff brought her water, she was deeply involved in another world. She lifted her head slightly and smiled when she lifted her hand to accept the water.

Geoff looked down at her and turned to walk down the beach in the direction the boys had run. As he started to walk away, Cynthia called out, "Oh Geoff. If you're not doing anything, would you mind driving back to the little store we saw in the last town? We could use some more fruit before you leave tomorrow. There just wasn't enough room for everything in the car."

Geoff looked back at her, sitting with her long legs stretched out on the sand, her hat shielding her face and her sunglasses shielding her eyes. She was wearing short shorts and a crop top which exposed her midriff. She looked very serene and happy as she smiled up at him.

"Of course. I'll go right now." Geoff turned and trudged through the sand back to the car. He glanced back at Cynthia and saw that her head was down in her book again. He opened the car door and slid inside, already hot and stuffy from sitting in the sun. He turned the key in the ignition and drove away.

That afternoon, after some fruit and rice for lunch, Geoff convinced Cynthia to go for a walk with him and the boys. "Just a little walk down the beach. We won't go far. The boys found a tide pool down there and they want to show it to you."

"Oh, all right." Cynthia put down her book and held out her hand to Geoff who pulled her up. She adjusted her hat and without waiting for him, called out, "Randy, Brian, show me that tidepool you found." They were far down the beach and immediately came running back. Randy grabbed his mother's hand and Brian took Geoff's hand as they continued walking. The boys chattered happily but their parents were mostly silent.

After examining the tidepool, Cynthia wanted to go back to the campsite. She walked along the beach where the waves washed up on the shore, enjoying the sensation of the sand as it

seeped between her toes. Randy and Brian walked with Geoff, who walked in the dry sand a few feet away from Cynthia.

Geoff looked at Cynthia walking through the surf and said to Brian, "Do you remember the last time we were at the beach and we talked about walking in deep sand like this?"

Brian nodded his head. "Remember how we discovered that when we walk in the sand like this that it makes our bodies stronger?"

Randy said, "I remember, Daddy!"

"I'm glad you remember, too, Randy. Walking in the sand like this is a little like how we live our everyday lives." Geoff looked back at Cynthia and his face became solemn.

Randy was perplexed. "I don't understand what you mean."

"Well, Randy. Right now, you boys have happy, carefree lives. You go to school and play and you don't have to worry about grown-up problems, like paying bills or having a job."

"But I still don't understand about the sand."

"Let me see if I can explain it better. When you walk in the sand, your body gets stronger because you have to work a little harder. It takes no effort to walk on the sand near the water. When you get more grown-up, Randy, there will be times when you'll have to make decisions about whether you should do something really hard to help someone else or sacrifice your comfort to achieve something important ... " Geoff looked at Randy and Brian's confused faces and said, "Don't worry about it now. You'll understand better when you get a little older." He smiled down at his sons, laughed, and said, "Now go have fun!"

Later that afternoon, when the sun was sinking lower and lower in the west, Cynthia began her preparations for dinner. "Geoff, can you pour some of the water into this pot? I want to start heating the water for spaghetti."

Geoff picked up the large water jug and brought it over to the camp stove where Cynthia had a large pot ready. He poured in the water until Cynthia put up her hand indicating 'enough'. She placed it on the little stove and lit the burner.

"Cynthia, why don't you let me take care of this part? Why don't you relax and I can put in the spaghetti when the water's

ready?"

Cynthia looked at him quizzically, but said, "Sure, that sounds fine. I guess I'll take a little walk, but I'll be back in time to heat up the marinara sauce. Don't let the spaghetti boil too long." She rose to her feet, looked at the ocean, and said, "That setting sun is going to be fantastic tonight. Look at the way those clouds are streaking across the sky."

"Well go on and enjoy it and I'll see to the pasta. I'll even have a drink ready for you, too!"

She smiled at him briefly as she walked away.

Cynthia found herself walking in the direction of the setting sun. It had a mesmerizing effect, clearing her mind of the book she was reading as well as the slightly discontented feeling she had when she was with her family. She chose to think, instead, about Marius and how she felt when she was with him.

He'd been pressing her more frequently to leave Geoff and go away with him to France. It was very tempting, but she couldn't see herself ever doing such a thing. Marius was fabulous and she knew he loved her. He told her all the time, which could be annoying. But just because she had a good time with him didn't mean she was in love with him. Cynthia still wasn't sure she knew what 'in love' meant.

She had to admit that Marius fulfilled her in many ways that Geoff never could. She loved tapping in to her wild side, a side she intuitively felt would shock Geoff. Marius and she loved to fly and enjoyed every aspect of aviation. He understood the rush of freedom it gave her. Geoff didn't understand the force it was in her life. But she knew that Marius wouldn't be satisfied with their 'status quo' forever. What was she going to do? She admired Geoff's intellect and that everyone at the Embassy seemed to value his work. It was rather a good life. There was a certain amount of prestige, they'd traveled all over the world and, surely, there were more adventures to come. If only Geoff wasn't so staid, so solemn and conservative. He could be positively boring at times.

Cynthia saw the sun had almost set and turned back to the campsite. She hoped Geoff hadn't boiled the spaghetti too long.

He was so worthless sometimes.

Geoff pulled the pot of spaghetti off the burner and was just beginning to strain it into a bowl when Cynthia arrived back at the campsite. "What are you doing?" she shouted.

With the bowl of spaghetti in his hand, he turned toward her and said, "Dinner will be ready in no time, Bal. We only need to heat up the marinara sauce and…"

Before he could say another word, Cynthia grabbed the bowl out of his hands, looked inside briefly, and screamed, "You've ruined it, Geoff! This spaghetti is worthless, just like you! I told you to be careful. Look what you've done!"

Geoff stepped back as if he'd been slapped, and his mouth gaped open in stunned silence. Randy and Brian stood behind him, watching, their eyes rounded in horror, and they instinctively backed away. Then Cynthia, with the bowl of spaghetti still in her hands, took two steps toward the ocean and tossed the entire contents out onto the beach.

Geoff suddenly awoke, as if from a daze, and took a step toward her. "I was only trying to help, Cynthia. What's the matter with you? Why have you done this? It's crazy!" She turned on him, her hands clenched and teeth barred, like a wild animal.

"What's the matter with me? I'm crazy? Let me tell you what's the matter with you, with this whole family!" Her arms flailed about her. "Let me tell you what I have to put up with day after day! I'm sick to death of your 'oh so proper, so polite' attitude. You take pride in being a milquetoast, a company man…"

While his mother continued to rave, Randy grabbed Brian's arm and dragged him away down the beach, dodging the clumps of spaghetti. Much later, after all was quiet, they returned to the campsite, crawled into their tent, and settled in for a long, hungry night.

The next morning it was like nothing had happened. Randy crawled out of his tent to see his mother preparing his favorite breakfast. She had fried buttered slices of French bread with an egg cooked in the middle of each slice along with slabs of crisp bacon and a mound of fried potatoes on the side. She handed plates to Randy and Brian with a big smile.

"Wow, Mom, this is great. My favorite!" Randy looked around and said, "Where's Daddy?"

"Oh, he remembered he has an important meeting at the office this afternoon, so he left last night. I guess you and Brian were still out walking when he left. He asked me to tell you 'Goodbye'. Cynthia didn't look at Randy as she spoke but pretended to concentrate on her meal.

"Is he coming back?"

"Of course!" Cynthia looked up at him, suddenly noticing his fearful look. "He'll be back next weekend. It's all OK." She resumed her breakfast and nothing more was said about it.

From that time on, Randy and Brian referred to this trip as "Spaghetti Beach" but were careful never to mention it in front of their mother.

VINGT-SEPT

"The hunt for a scapegoat is the easiest of all hunting expeditions."

XXVII. Virginia. October 1962

Toward the end of their second tour of duty in Cambodia, the Stuarts took their second home leave. This time they decided to fly through London and on to Washington, D.C. Geoff had arranged to have an early Thanksgiving with his brother, Edward, and his family. They all met at the family retreat in southern Virginia. Geoff's younger brother had purchased some acreage a few years earlier, and while walking the land soon after, discovered a Civil War era, two-story farmhouse. Everyone was looking forward to getting together out there in the countryside. The Autumn weather was mild and the leaves had just started to turn.

Edward and his young family had recently returned from the Middle East after serving with the CIA in that part of the world for several years. It had been quite an adventure, but now with children getting older, he and his wife, Joyce, were ready for a normal 'white-picket' American experience of TV and neighborhood birthday parties. Edward was currently working on a law degree.

The old house was a little ramshackle with no indoor plumbing, but Edward and Geoff decided it was the perfect getaway place. It was very rustic, but a fireplace kept it warm on chilly nights and the patched roof kept out the rain. Edward had fixed up an old oil barrel as an indoor grill. It was cut in half lengthwise, and with wood or coal, provided not only a perfect place for cooking but additional heating, as necessary. There was a pump outside, that with a little effort, brought forth clear, fresh spring water.

Edward had a little tractor on the place, with a small, open trailer attached. He used the tractor's attachment to cut back the tall grass or hook up the trailer to haul wood for the fireplace. It also proved to be a fun treat for Randy, Brian, and their cousins to ride in. After all the kids piled into the trailer, Geoff drove them around, like a little merry-go-round.

Everyone loved the place. It was quiet, peaceful, and relaxing. Geoff especially enjoyed spending time with his brother. "Edward, I'm so happy we were able to get together here with your family this year." Edward nodded his agreement. "Our Thanksgiving meal yesterday was great, and this place is perfect for family times. Maybe we could plan a few projects in the future to fix it up a little, you know, to make it easier on the women."

Edward and Geoff were standing out in front of the huge wrap-around porch, watching the kids romp among the trees. Randy was leading them in a project right now, building a 'hideout' from branches and whatever else they could find. "I would like to do that, Geoff. I love this place and I hope we'll be able to enjoy it for many years to come."

They walked up the porch steps and joined their wives who were sitting on the porch, sipping iced tea. Edward's wife, Joyce, called out as they approached, "Can I get you guys anything? We have fresh coffee inside and some left-over pie from yesterday." Cynthia was reading a book and didn't look up.

"That sounds fine," Geoff said. "But don't get up. I can get it myself. Does anyone else care for anything?" He looked at Cynthia, who only shook her head no. Edward and Joyce noticed how Geoff's open, happy face instantly changed to one of

surrender.

Cynthia felt that if she kept her head down in her book everyone would leave her alone. It wasn't working very well. She hadn't wanted to come on this trip but spending time with Geoff's brother and family wasn't a complete disaster. She'd enjoyed chatting with Joyce about their overseas experiences. Even Edward, whom she barely knew, was quite funny and engaging. How could two brothers be so different? Well, she reminded herself, Randy and Brian were as different as night and day. At least the boys seemed to be having fun with their cousins, which kept them from annoying her.

She was a little concerned about Geoff. He seemed even more distant from her than usual. Based on how he'd been treating her lately, she almost believed that he was the one having an affair. He was gone three or four days every week, traveling God knows where or off on hunting trips. Geoff, who had never raised his voice in his life was suddenly shouting back at her. Not only was he distant, but he had an attitude about him… it was almost as if he just tolerated her like he didn't give a damn one way or the other. He doted on Brian and Brian was crazy about him. When Geoff was home, he chose to spend his time with Brian, working on some project or helping with his schoolwork. Did Geoff suspect anything? Was that why he was so changed toward her?

"Cynthia…. Cynthia!" Cynthia's head snapped up when she heard her name. "That must be a really good book." Joyce looked down at her with a smile. "I just want to tell you that Edward and I will be leaving earlier than we thought, this morning, in fact."

"So soon? I thought you all would be staying at least a couple more days."

"We did, too, but Edward has an important exam coming up and he wants to hit the books. You understand."

Cynthia rose from her chair and took Joyce's hand, "Of course, I understand. He's starting a whole new career and this is important for all of you."

Joyce nodded her head and said, "I've enjoyed spending this time with you…getting to know you. I hope we'll have many more visits in the future."

"Of course, we will." She walked Joyce down the steps toward their station wagon where Edward was finishing loading up the bedrolls and suitcases. The kids were all gathered together, excitedly planning their next vacation together. Cynthia noticed that Geoff pulled Edward away from the group and was speaking too softly for her to hear. She didn't like what she saw and immediately began to worry that Geoff was talking to his brother about her. Maybe that's why they were leaving so soon. Maybe they didn't like her.

Everyone hugged and kissed and promised to write. After one last wave, the Edward Stuart family drove away down the rutted dirt road that led to the highway. Geoff stood looking after them until they were gone from sight. He turned around and, from the porch, Cynthia saw that look on his face. That unhappy, sad look that had become too familiar. But this time, he had tears in his eyes. She couldn't stand it.

"Geoff," she said as he approached the porch steps, "I think I'll drive into town to pick up a few things."

"I don't think we need anything."

"But we finished the last of the turkey and everything last night and the coffee is almost gone."

"We have other supplies, Cynthia. You don't need to…"

"It's all right. I don't mind making the trip." She ducked inside the house to pick up her purse and was soon trotting down the porch stairs on her way to the rental car. "There's sandwiches and chips and leftover potato salad for lunch. I'll be back before you know it." With a backward wave, Cynthia hopped into the car and was soon driving down the road. Geoff stood silently looking after her. It seemed he did that a lot.

After Cynthia left, Randy and Brian continued playing outside until Geoff called them in for lunch. Geoff set out a plate of sandwiches, with bowls of potato salad and chips. Paper plates and glasses of lemonade stood beside the food on the porch table. Randy ran up the steps to fix his plate. Brian was lagging behind and Geoff told Randy to help him with his plate.

"Can't he get it himself? Good grief, he's almost eight years old. He's such a baby." Randy turned to Brian who was climbing

the steps to the porch and said, "Are you a baby, Brian? You can't do anything by yourself, can you? You're just a big baby." Even though Randy laughed as he said the words, Brian was hurt and began to whine.

"I'm not a b..b..ba..baby!"

Randy laughed again and said, "If you're not a baby then you can get your plate yourself."

Suddenly, Geoff leaped from his chair and shouted, "Randy, quit teasing your brother and help him! Right now!"

Geoff rarely raised his voice, and as Randy looked up at his father, he realized this was serious. His laughter immediately died and his mouth fell open as he watched his father begin to pull off his belt.

"Daddy, I'm sorry! I'll help Brian." But it was too late.

Geoff lashed out at the boy where he stood. As the belt whipped across his back and legs, Randy tried to cover his head with his arms. Geoff struck with the full length of the belt again and again. Randy tried to twist his body away, but the blows kept raining down while his father roared, "You will not tease your brother! You will listen to me and you will learn to obey!"

Suddenly the belt broke and part of it flew off, landing in the grass below the porch. Geoff lowered his arm then, the broken piece of the belt still clutched in his hand. He looked at Randy as if he didn't know him. Randy, still hunched over, cautiously looked up with tears streaming down his face. Geoff slowly turned and walked into the house.

Brian came over to Randy and looked up at him. Ugly, red welts had already appeared on his legs. During the beating, Randy hadn't made a sound. Brian whispered, "Wh..Wh..Why d.d.d.did't you run away?"

Randy wiped his face with his arm and looking at the house doorway, said, "I don't know. I just couldn't."

VINGT-HUIT

"Always be sincere even if you don't mean it." Harry Truman

XXVIII. Phnom Penh. February 1963

Since returning from home leave, Cynthia noticed a feeling of stress and anxiety she hadn't felt in a long time, not since before they came to Cambodia. At first, she didn't recognize the inner turmoil that was taking a toll on her well-being. One morning after her shower, she caught herself in the mirror and noticed that she was chewing the inside of her cheek. She stopped, but then a few minutes later she caught herself doing it again. She began to notice that this unconscious habit had become a part of her daily existence. Even Geoff had noticed and asked her about it.

"Cynthia, is one of your teeth hurting, or do you have a sore inside your mouth?"

Surprised by the question, she responded, "No, why do you ask?"

"Well, I've noticed that you seem to be bothered with something inside your mouth. It looks like you're biting the inside of your cheek."

"No, nothing's wrong. I didn't even know I was doing it. It's nothing." Now that she was conscious of the nervous tic, she

tried to control it, but that didn't work very well. As she gave it more thought, she concluded that the situation with Marius was the source. Their relationship was getting to be a problem and she couldn't control that any more than she could control her unconscious cheek chewing.

Every time she saw Marius, he pressed her about leaving Geoff. So far, she'd been able to stall him with one excuse or another. "It's not a good time, and the boys are still so young. Don't tell me you want me to leave Geoff and the boys, too?"

"Why not? You have told me more than once that you're not made to be a mother and that having children was a big mistake."

It was true, she had told Marius how she felt about the burden of motherhood. "But they're still my sons. I can't go off and leave them, especially with Geoff's division so unsettled. Without me to take care of the boys…"

"What? What would happen? You're gone all the time now!" Marius stood before her, his arms crossed in front of his chest, almost daring her to come up with a convincing answer.

Cynthia began to feel herself getting angry as Marius taunted her. Tears sprang to her eyes, a surprising response to his hurtful words. She pushed the emotion down and said, "Even with the maids, Geoff won't be able to care for the boys on his own, especially at their age. He'd have to send them to a boarding school or his mother back in Georgia!"

"So, what is bad about that?" Marius smirked.

"They're my sons, Marius. I couldn't do that to them, especially Brian. Randy would be all right, I suppose, but Brian," she took a breath, looked away, and said, "he wouldn't be able to handle being separated from Geoff." She looked up at Marius and said, "No matter what I may have said in the past, I'm not as bad a mother as all that." Marius said nothing more about it that day, but she knew he was not satisfied with her excuses.

With all that had happened with Marius and realizing how her marriage had deteriorated, she still felt loyalty to Geoff. He had promised her travel and excitement, and these last few years had been a great adventure. He gave her anything she wanted. They got along well most of the time, like old friends. It was too bad he

was so calm. That was a word he used quite frequently when things got hectic, especially when Randy got overly enthusiastic about something. "I want everyone to be calm," he'd say. Cynthia yawned when she thought about their marriage.

Marius was completely different. She felt so alive with him, all her senses on fire. He challenged her ability as a pilot and he challenged her as a person. If he had a problem with her for any reason, he didn't hold back. He told her, plain and simple. Sometimes they yelled at each other. Sometimes they talked it through, but either way, they generally found an answer and worked it out. He wasn't afraid of her or her tirades.

There was always the danger of getting caught and it was exciting. The thrill of danger was addicting, and the danger was real, not just because of their affair, but because Marius was a hot head and might be dangerous. Even though she'd seen no evidence herself, the idea that he may have been involved in a smuggling operation was always in the back of her mind. And the disappearance of some innocent man was unsettling. What if Marius was involved? Was he guilty of something criminal, even murder?

Cynthia thought of all this when she remembered the angry behavior she'd witnessed in the years she'd known him. Marius didn't hesitate to throw tools or anything at hand when he got upset. Once he hit the hangar wall with his fist, leaving a large dent in the sheet metal. That time, when he punched the wall, she knew he was angry with her. At the time she brushed it off and left. She didn't believe he would ever hurt her or Geoff, but he was a passionate man. If she kept putting him off...she wasn't sure what he might do.

It was an unsettling time. Geoff and the rest of the agricultural division were briefed that the Communists were getting stronger in Laos as well as Vietnam. Prince Sihanouk was not being as cooperative and the Embassy was unsure of his continued support. The Cold War was heating up in the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs disaster in 1961 followed by the Cuban Missile Crisis this last October 1962. The prospect of nuclear war seemed all

too real. People in the states were building bomb shelters in their backyards. Greater numbers of people were being killed in Vietnam and the US was sending in more advisors. There was even talk of the US conducting bombing missions.

Cynthia and Geoff discussed all these worries after the boys were in bed. "I won't be traveling as much now, Cynthia. Our division is pulling back from some of the more remote areas. We've always relied on cooperation from Cambodian farmers and technicians, but with the Communist encroachment, especially in the border regions, we can't risk it anymore."

"How sad for those people, Geoff. All the work you've done and now…"

"I know. We spent a lot of time trying to help those people with better methods and tools…. Just so they could feed their families. And by the way, our own family may be impacted in the next year or two. We expect that our division will have to close if things don't improve." Geoff tapped his hands on the armrests of his chair, looked away with resignation, and said, "There's a real possibility it will only get worse."

"You mean, we'll be transferred?" Cynthia had not considered that they would be forced to leave Cambodia. This news was a surprise. "Where, Geoff? When will we get notice?"

Geoff turned and looked into her eyes with a twisted smile. "Cynthia, we are now experiencing the life of an FSO and family. We go where we're told with no questions. I can try to negotiate up to a point, but in the end, it's out of my hands. In the meantime, I'll keep on doing my job the best I can."

One afternoon a few weeks after this conversation, Geoff picked up Cynthia at the airport after she returned from flying a couple of medical personnel to the hospital at Lamphot in Kratie. As she collected her gear, he walked around the plane and found a bullet hole near the bottom. "Cynthia, there's a bullet hole here! Did someone shoot at you?" Geoff was genuinely alarmed.

"Geoff, I've been shot at a few times, but that was the first time I was hit. I'm not really sure when it happened." Cynthia began to walk over to the car.

"Why didn't you tell me? I'm not sure you can do this

anymore."

"What do you mean I can't do this anymore?" She turned back to face Geoff and saw the frown on his face. She said, "You mean I can't fly anymore? You can't be serious! No harm was done."

Geoff moved closer until his face was just a few inches away from hers. "Your flying days are over! It's too dangerous out there and I will not have my wife putting herself at risk." He walked past her and slid into the driver seat and started the engine. Cynthia silently got into the car and Geoff steered the car away from the airport and the hangar where the plane stood.

"Geoff, please listen to me," Cynthia pleaded as he drove toward home. "Yes, I was shot at and yes the plane was hit. But I've flown countless times up there and I've always been safe. You cannot ground me because of one isolated incident! It will probably never happen again. I refuse to let you do this to me."

With his eyes on the road, Geoff said, "You can talk all you want and give me every reason in the book. You can yell and scream. But I've had it. I've told you how dangerous things are getting, and you are not going back up in that plane." He turned his head briefly to face her. "In fact, I want you to sell your share to Gardinier or anybody else as soon as possible." Cynthia gasped and started to speak, but Geoff interrupted her and said, "You won't change my mind this time, Cynthia. I'll do whatever I have to do."

Cynthia sat back in the car seat and looked away, trying to fathom what had just happened. Geoff had never spoken to her that way. What would Marius say?

VINGT-NEUF

"Life's under no obligation to give us what we expect." Margaret Mitchell

XXIX. Phnom Penh. March 1963

When Cynthia arrived at the airport the next afternoon, she found Marius waiting impatiently for her. He jogged over to her car, opened the door, and pulled her into his arms.

"Marius, be careful! Someone could see!" Cynthia pulled away and walked around him to the hangar.

Marius followed her to where the Rallye was parked. They had planned to fly today and he began the routine walk-around inspection. Cynthia could see he was sulking and joined him. "Marius," she spoke softly, "don't be angry. You forget I'm a married woman and you know how small the diplomatic community is. I have to be careful."

"I know, oh how I know!" Marius refused to look at her and continued walking around the plane. "I get so tired of all this. It's hard to hold my feelings back all the time."

"I understand. I feel the same way, but we've talked about this before. If we want to continue seeing each other…"

"I know!" Marius took a breath and said, "OK, let's forget it

for now and fly someplace we can be alone. But we need to talk! I can't keep living this way."

"All right, we'll talk, but later, OK? Something happened and I need to ask you to do something for me."

"What is it? You know I'll do anything for you!" He gripped her hands and peered into her eyes with concern.

"I need to sell my share of the plane. Could I sell it to you?" Marius's face changed instantly and she hurried on before he could respond. "Geoff found a bullet hole and he's convinced it's not safe for me to fly anymore. In fact, he's demanded that I sell the plane."

"What? He can't do that! That plane belongs to us, Cynthia, you and me. He can't make you sell your share!" Marius paced about, furious.

"He was so angry with me when I told him that I'd been shot at before. Marius, I've never seen him so determined. He means it! He'll find a way to make me sell my share. He knows people…he won't listen to me."

Marius stopped pacing and looked at the plane and then back at her. "I can't do it. I don't have the cash right now….maybe later." He ran his hand through his hair and looked off into the distance. "When does he want you to sell?"

"I don't know. He said as soon as possible. Is there anyone else who would take my share?"

"Cynthia, listen to what you're saying! I won't let anyone buy your share. I won't have anyone else. And he can't make me do it. I have to agree to any sale of any part of this plane!" Cynthia saw the anger building and knew she had to diffuse it.

"OK, OK. I understand and I agree completely with what you're saying. I'll try talking to Geoff again. He's got to be reasonable about this."

"Come away with me Cynthia!" He grabbed her hands and pulled her in close. "All this trouble would be solved if we were together."

"Marius, we can't do this now. I need Geoff's agreement on this thing. Even though half this plane is mine, it's not completely. When Geoff and I went to collect the plane in France, he got his

name added as co-owner along with me."

"But I have a copy of the ownership records. I didn't see his name! How could he do that?" He searched her eyes. "Oh, I forgot, he knows people." Marius clenched his fists and shouted, "But it won't work. I'll kill him first!" He walked back into the shadows of the hangar and she heard things crashing to the floor and against the sides of the hangar.

Cynthia had never seen him so angry. She should have been frightened, but she felt she could still calm him down. She followed him into the hangar.

She found him leaning against some shelving in the back corner, smoking a cigarette. He was taunting her now. He knew she hated for him to smoke. "Marius, I promise I'll talk to Geoff and I'll get him to change his mind." She paused a moment, thinking of what she could do. "I know… if I leave now, I can probably catch him before dinner, maybe while the boys are still at school…"

Marius suddenly exploded in rage. "Merde, non!" Cynthia, startled, stepped back. He grabbed her upper arms and pulled her in close. Marius's face, inches from her own, streamed with sweat and his hair hung in his wild eyes. He looked like a different man from the one she thought she knew, and it scared her.

His lips peeled back from his teeth as he spit out his anger. "Not now! You are not going to run away from me again! For two years I waited for you! Two years! I never waited more than two days for any woman in my life. You witch, you tease! You make me crazy and then you go back to your nice home and your husband, leaving me alone. He has you and now he wants to take away our plane, our plane! It belongs to you and me, Cynthia. You belong to me! You're mine!" He pressed his lips hard on hers, jerked her around and shoved her back against the wall, her head slamming against the sheet metal. Marius had never been like this with her before. She was paralyzed with fear and couldn't speak.

Cynthia pounded on his head and shoulders and pulled his hair. "Marius," she whimpered, "please don't do this! Please, not here!" She was desperate for him to stop his attack, but also desperate that no one would hear. She couldn't move and knew

it was useless to try. She gave up fighting and let her hands hang at her sides, trying not to think as the tears stained her cheeks.

When he finally released her, she couldn't think of anything except that she needed to get away. He grasped her hand, and seeing her tears, said, "I'm sorry, ma Cherie. I'm sorry. Did I hurt you? Please forgive me. I'll never hurt you again. Will you forgive me?" He gently wiped away her tears. "Do you still love me?"

Cynthia was bruised and sore. She felt the back of her head to see if she was bleeding. Cynthia looked into his contrite, bloodshot eyes and simply nodded. She pulled his hand away, quickly straightened her clothes and jogged to her car, calling out in a shaky voice, "I have to go." She didn't look back. Marius raked his hand through his hair as he watched her drive away, his face a mask of pain. Then he lit a cigarette and leaned against the hangar wall.

Driving home, Cynthia began to shake uncontrollably. The sense of control she always felt was gone. Sobs heaved out from deep within her chest. She immediately pulled off onto a side road and hunched her head over the steering wheel. As she tried to compose herself her thoughts were a mass of confusion. "What is wrong with me? I'm fine! I'm OK. Nothing is wrong! Pull yourself together, Cynthia." She pounded the steering wheel in frustration as the sobs continued to wrack her body.

She lost track of the time and when she finally raised her head and dried her tears, she saw that dusk was approaching. Shafts of sunlight glinted off the windshield and the surrounding homes, where lights were blinking on one by one. Her ragged breathing steadied, and she looked at her face in the little mirror attached to the sun visor. A little blotchy but she could blame the heat. Thank goodness, except for the top blouse button, her clothes weren't torn.

She chose not to think about what just happened or why, only that she had to get home and act completely normal. She was comforted with the thought that when she entered her home, everything would be as it should be. The cook would be in the kitchen and her sons might be listening to the radio. She could relax with a bath and a much-needed drink before dinner. She

started the car and pulled back onto the street that led home.

TRENTE

"I get so tired of moral bookkeeping." Katherine Anne Porter

XXX. Phnom Penh. March 1963

Cynthia had not been to the airport or seen Marius for over a week. Geoff assumed it was because he'd told her not to fly anymore. Ever since that horrible day Cynthia tried her best to act as if nothing was on her mind and that everything was going well in her life. She could pull it off during the day. She spent more time at the Bi-National Center and volunteered at the Embassy library. She called up the Ambassador's wife to let her know that she was available to assist with any upcoming events.

But at night, after dinner when the boys had gone to bed, it was just she and Geoff. She tried reading, but her mind filled with ugly thoughts. Listening to the radio was no good because Geoff preferred concerts to the mysteries and dramas she liked. He read or had paperwork from the office that he worked on. She couldn't get Marius out of her mind…what he'd done and what he'd threatened.

One morning after everyone had left the house for the day, there was a knock on her door. Cynthia looked out the window and saw the man from the French Embassy, the one who told her

about Marius back in 1959. There was another man with him, someone she didn't recognize.

As she walked to the door, she could feel her anxiety level suddenly increase. She took a breath and opened the door.

"Good morning Madame Stuart."

"Good morning, Monsieur Pelletier. I haven't seen you in quite some time. What brings you to my home today?"

"May we come in?"

Cynthia thought a moment. She was alone in the house. The maid wasn't expected until afternoon. "Of course." She opened the door wide and waved them through. "Please sit down. May I get you anything? There is still coffee from breakfast."

"Thank you, but no. May I introduce Mr. Joe Hayden. He's with the CIA." Cynthia's hand flew to her throat in surprise, but she collected herself and held out her hand and shook both men's hands before sitting down. Joe Hayden was somewhat scruffy compared to the well-groomed Pelletier. Hayden's thinning blonde hair hung over his shirt collar and, instead of a suit, he wore a barong, the thin, embroidered long-sleeved shirt worn by men in the Philippines. His brown slacks needed pressing. The men seated themselves on the sofa facing Cynthia.

"My! This is a surprise. Mr. Hayden…have you been in Phnom Penh long? And what can I possibly do for you?"

Over the next thirty minutes, the two men explained how Marius Gardinier had been under their surveillance off and on for quite some time. Cynthia flushed in humiliation, realizing that they probably both knew about her relationship with Marius. She shifted in her chair in discomfort.

"Mrs. Stuart," began the CIA man, "at first we were interested in Mr. Gardinier because of his possible criminal connections before he arrived in Cambodia. And until recently it appeared that he was not involved in any narcotics trafficking or really anything suspicious at all. We were about to suspend surveillance when one of our men picked up on some activity…flights to unknown destinations at odd times… and other activity that was completely at odds with his usual routine." Both men leaned forward, their forearms resting on their knees. Cynthia shifted again.

"Well… how does any of this involve me? Why are you telling me this?"

Mr. Pelletier responded, "Madame, we know about your relationship with Mr. Gardinier." Cynthia raised her hand and started to speak, but he continued, "We are not here to judge or to threaten you in any way. Until recently, it was none of our business. But now we think you could help us. This is just between us. No one else needs to know anything."

Cynthia lowered her hand back to her lap and bowed her head for a moment. Her head came up and she looked each man in the eye. "I want you to know that I do not intend to see Mr. Gardiner again. So, I don't know what I can do about any of this."

"Have you broken with him? Does he know this?" Monsieur Pelletier suddenly seemed anxious.

The CIA man broke in. "We have reason to believe that Mr. Gardinier at this moment may be finalizing an agreement with a known heroin trafficker. We believe he plans to transport the heroin into Thailand from where it will be shipped to the United States."

Cynthia froze in horror. "I still don't know what I can do! Even though I haven't seen Marius in a while, I'm sure he believes we will see each other again soon. If he's been out of the country, that explains why he hasn't tried to contact me."

"That's good." Mr. Hayden continued, excitedly. "We need you to see him when he returns to Cambodia. We want you to find out where he's been. Pretend you're angry that he hasn't contacted you. Try to find out where he's been and, most importantly, try to find out if he's come into a large amount of money, and how he got it. If you can find out who he's seen…"

"Hold on a minute!" Cynthia shouted. Both men leaned back in their seats in shock at her outburst. "This is nuts! I'm not some Mata Hari. I'm not a trained agent! I can't possibly get involved with any of this!"

The men sat silently and looked at each other briefly. Mr. Hayden spoke in a softer tone than before. "You're right. But if you could at least meet with him, ask where he's been and make note of how he behaves. Does he seem nervous or anxious about

anything? Anything at all would be so helpful. We wouldn't ask if we felt there was the slightest risk of danger to you."

Cynthia sneered. "Oh, really?" She sat silently for a couple of minutes. The men stared at her but said nothing more. "OK. I have to meet him, anyway, to finalize plans on a plane we own and, as I said earlier, I've already decided to break it off with him. I have to tell him to his face, at least."

The two men stood up. The Frenchman handed her his card. "Please call me after you see him. Anything at all, even the smallest, most insignificant thing could be very important."

"I won't thank you for coming by, but I will call you. I am a patriotic American. But remember… just as you rely on me to keep this conversation confidential, my life with my husband and sons depends on your promise to me."

She looked at each man sharply as they replied, "Of course." She shook their hands and led them to the door to see them out. She stood in the doorway until she saw them drive away down the street. She turned and went to the liquor tray to pour herself a Bloody Mary.

TRENTE ET UN

"A dame that knows the ropes isn't likely to get tied up." Mae West

XXXI. Tonle Sap River. March 1963

Cynthia drove out to the airport a week after her surprise guests visited. She thought of nothing else in the interim but tried to put on a normal, routine act for Geoff and everyone else. It was a struggle when she performed her 'calling' chores. All the women she ran into were anxious to catch up with her since the last time they'd seen each other. It was always a strain, being polite and engaging with people she didn't really care about, but she knew that if she didn't behave properly, it would surely get back to the Ambassador.

As she parked in front of the little hangar where she and Marius kept the Rallye, she looked around for Marius. The hangar door was open, so she knew he must be somewhere nearby. She saw his motorcycle parked a little behind the plane. She got out of the car and stood next to its door. Her stomach clenched and she realized she couldn't make herself go inside the hangar. She called out, "Marius! Are you in there? Where are you?" All was quiet.

She walked around to the side of the hangar and looked out

towards the terminal building and the runway. Suddenly she felt a hand on her shoulder and she jumped.

"Marius! You startled me! Don't sneak up on me like that." Marius stood with his arms open for a hug, a big smile on his face. She leaned in and casually air-kissed each cheek. "Where have you been so long? Have you been on a trip? It seems I haven't seen you in an age." She realized she was talking nervously and took a breath to calm down. Cynthia gazed up into his eyes and she didn't see anything unusual. Still handsome, charming Marius. Her stomach clenched again.

"Oh, I have lots of news, Cherie. But come over here where we can talk." He pulled her toward the hangar.

"Marius, could we go somewhere else? How about we go over to the quay at the river? We can walk and there's a café where we can get something to drink." She began to walk toward her car. "You know the place. Remember? We've been there before."

"But we can talk right here. Aren't you worried someone will see us together?"

"Don't worry, it will be all right. Come on… I'll meet you there, OK?"

Marius smiled and called out, "I'll see you in fifteen minutes!" He waved as she drove away. Looking into her rear-view mirror, she saw him run to his motorcycle. She knew she was taking a chance, but she had no choice.

Marius was waiting for her when she arrived. He was sitting on the parked motorcycle and he climbed off and ambled over to her car and opened the door for her. "What took you so long?" he laughed as he took her hand and kissed it. "Did you miss me while I was away?"

"About that, Marius, just where have you been?"

"Oh, it's not so very much. A client wanted me to fly over to Bangkok for a few days. He wanted me to carry some cargo for him." He grinned as they began to walk down the riverside. "I actually did three trips for him. It paid very well, too."

"What kind of cargo?"

"Oh, nothing interesting. He said he's moving his office and he needed a safe person to transfer his confidential documents.

Just a few boxes, not that heavy." Cynthia could tell he was lying. He looked away and he started to light a cigarette, but quickly put it away. He was nervous. He ran his hand through his hair and said, "But that doesn't matter. The job is done, I got paid and now I am back with you!"

"Was it just in Thailand that you flew or did you have to go somewhere else?" She tried to sound casual.

"Why all the questions? OK…I did go up to Burma a couple of times. It was not a problem, just short stops."

"Burma! All the way up there? Isn't Burma a little crazy right now?"

"Oh, it was fine. Now can we talk about something else?" Cynthia saw that her questions had definitely agitated him. What had he done? She decided not to push it any further.

"Yes, there is something I need to talk to you about." Cynthia's voice softened and she suddenly felt nervous herself. This was not going to be easy. She wished she could get into her car and drive away. "Why don't we find that café and get something cool to drink?"

"Sure, that sounds good." Marius's voice sounded relieved.

After they sat down with their drinks, Cynthia played with the stir stick in her drink for a moment, gathered her nerve, and said, "I can't see you anymore."

"What did you say?" Marius's face turned hard. "Does your husband know? Did he make you say this?"

"No, he knows nothing about us. And no one makes me do anything, Marius! You should know that!"

"He's making you sell the plane!"

"This is different, Marius. This is my decision, and it's final!" Seeing Marius's face, she realized she hadn't meant to be so harsh. Her voice softened and she said, "Marius, you and I know this had to happen sometime. This is for the best."

"No, Cynthia, it is not for the best. We are always so happy together. I always thought that we would be together! I believed you wanted that, too."

"I'm sorry if I let you think that, but it can never happen. We've had a wonderful time together, but it's over now. It has to

be over."

"You're angry about what happened... that last time when I..."

"Yes, Marius, that is part of it. You frightened me and you hurt me. Oh, not physically so much, but you treated me like a... like a prostitute. That wasn't love! I won't take a chance again... I won't be treated that way. But even if that hadn't happened, we'd have to go our separate ways sometime. I have a family, and I won't leave them. I can't do it."

Their drinks untouched, they sat quietly at the little café table. Cynthia's head was bowed and Marius looked out to the river.

"I have a lot of money." Cynthia looked up at him then. His voice was so even, without emotion. He still looked out to the river. "We can go away. I can give you whatever you want." Then he turned to her, grabbed her hand, and said, "Please don't leave me, Cynthia. Please."

"What are you saying? What has money to do with anything?"

"I thought that if I had a lot of money... I could give you a beautiful home in Paris, an apartment in Le Marais perhaps, or even Butte-Montmartre...we could have a little flying business, charters..." He turned to face Cynthia and pulled a huge wad of cash from his jacket pockets. "I got this for you, Cynthia, for us. Now we can be together!"

"What have you done?" Cynthia rose from her seat in horror. "No, Marius. I can't do this. I can't." She turned away and quickly walked away towards her car.

Marius jumped up and, after stuffing the cash back into his pockets, ran after her. She began to run, but he caught up to her just as she reached her car. "Cynthia, please don't run away. I love you, only you. I thought you loved me, too. I know you love me!"

"I never loved you, Marius. Never! I've never loved anyone." She shoved him away and climbed into her car. "Please leave me alone. I'm sorry, Marius. I'm sorry, but I can't change how I feel." She started the car and looked up at him standing there helplessly, tears glimmering in his eyes. "Please don't try to see me again." She put the car in gear, pulled away, and drove down the street.

Marius stood in the street and looked after her until the car was gone from sight. He turned and walked over to his motorcycle, sat down on the pavement next to it, put his head in his hands, and wept.

TRENTE-DEUX

"I like that torn, weathered look." Maria Brink

XXXII. Phnom Penh. April 1963

Cynthia had not seen or heard from Marius for almost two weeks. She agonized ceaselessly over her decision to break with him. She missed him. She missed his kisses, his sense of humor, and the look in his eyes when he made love to her. She missed flying with him and his knowledge of aviation. She missed that common thread she shared with him that was now completely broken. She felt hollow, as if her being was without substance. Was this how love felt? If this was love, she wanted none of it. Life was so much simpler before.

She called Mr. Pelletier one morning not long after her last meeting with Marius. She told him about Marius's trips to Burma and back to Bangkok and that he had seemed nervous with her questions. Cynthia didn't tell Mr. Pelletier about the money that Marius had shown her. If anyone had asked her why, she wouldn't have been able to say. She already felt guilty about everything, and somehow, it just seemed right to leave that piece out.

Cynthia felt a little hurt and surprised that Marius had not tried to contact her. After all, she told herself, she had asked him to

stay away. But still…. She tried to resume her life as best she could. Everyone seemed happy that she was home more often. Even Geoff seemed pleased at the change.

"I assume you're home more because you're not going to the airport these days. Am I right? What about the plane? "

"Yes, I haven't been out to the airport, just like you asked. We may have a hard time finding a buyer for my share of the plane, though. I don't think Marius will agree to just anyone… he can't afford to buy us out, and he doesn't want to get rid of the plane, to sell it I mean."

"Well, he can't stop us if we can find a buyer. But I understand it might be difficult. We're not in a rush anyway. Just as long as you don't fly… well, that's all I want for now." Geoff picked up his newspaper and returned to his reading. "You know, now that you have more time, maybe we can take the boys to a movie sometime, like we talked about before."

Cynthia sighed and said, "That sounds fine. Anytime you want to go will be OK with me." Geoff looked up at her and smiled.

The next day Cynthia went to the Bi-National Center to work with ESL students. She enjoyed teaching English to these students. Most were family members of diplomats or local dignitaries. On her way there, she thought she saw a motorcycle in her rear-view mirror, but when she parked at the center, it was gone. She didn't think about it again until she came out four hours later.

She opened the car door, tossed in her handbag, and was preparing to slide inside when she felt a hand on her neck. She knew who it was without looking. "Marius!" Cynthia turned around and there he stood. He looked horrible as if he hadn't slept or bathed in days. His hair was unkempt and dirty and it was obvious he hadn't bothered with shaving either.

"How dare you creep up on me like that! What's wrong with you? You look awful." Her tone was stronger than she felt.

"You know good and well what's wrong with me, ma Cheri."

"Don't call me that. I mean it, Marius, you really gave me a fright."

His eyes bored into her and he said, "Did I scare you, ma

Cheri? Did I frighten the pretty American woman?" His mouth turned into a menacing leer. Now Cynthia was scared. He leaned in closer and Cynthia could smell the stale tobacco and whatever liquor he'd been drinking. He must have been drinking a lot. He smelled worse than he looked. She pulled back, but he grabbed her arm.

"You can tell all your friends how you deceived the stupid Frenchman, how you made him think you were madly in love with him. You can go to your cocktail parties and entertain everyone with the story of the idiot Frenchman who was so in love with you that he risked everything, even his life, to be with you. I can almost hear the laughter!" He leaned in closer. "Will you laugh, too, ma Cheri?"

Cynthia looked into his eyes and hissed, "Take your hand off me! You're drunk and you smell." She pried his hand from her arm and quickly climbed into her car and slammed the door.

Marius staggered back and as she started the engine, he called out, "You can't get rid of me that easily. We own a plane together, remember? A beautiful plane that cost your husband a lot of money!" Cynthia started to back out of the parking space, but Marius plastered his face to the window and said menacingly, "If I can't have you, no one will. I'll kill you first." Cynthia gunned the engine and he lost his footing and collapsed backward onto the ground. He rolled to the side, laughing hysterically as Cynthia drove away.

Cynthia wiped the tears away as she drove and tried to forget the look of hate she saw on Marius's face. "What a nightmare this is! What if he comes to the house? What if he tries to hurt one of the boys or Geoff? What a god-awful mess."

TRENTE-TROIS

"The scariest monsters are the ones that lurk within our souls."
Edgar Allan Poe

XXXIII. Phnom Penh. Morning, April 15, 1963

Geoff woke up when he heard the noise. It sounded like a gunshot, close by. He went to the window but didn't see anything. The sun was just coming up and there was only the normal early morning activity on the street. Maybe it was just a backfire from some old car. He decided to go downstairs. Cynthia, also awake, asked, "What is it, Geoff? What was that noise?"

"I don't know. I'm going down to check." Pulling on his robe, Geoff cautiously descended the stairs. Suddenly, there was a banging on the front door. Geoff cracked open the door to a Cambodian man, who was shouting and waving his arm towards the carport. All Geoff could make out from his broken French was that he had been riding his bicycle down the street when he heard a loud noise from their house. "A man, a man… dead!" he yelled.

Creeping towards the carport, Geoff saw a figure sitting in the car, his head laid against the headrest. He cautiously edged toward the car, calling out, "Hello? Who are you? What do you want?"

The Cambodian was still waving his arms, yelling out in agitation, "Man dead! Man dead!" Geoff finally reached the car and peered inside. Yes, the man was dead. The face was badly disfigured and bloody and it appeared that part of his jaw was blown away. Geoff suddenly gagged and stepped away.

Trying to contain the bile rising in his throat, Geoff turned back toward the house. Cynthia was coming out the door. He rushed to her, put out his shaking hand, and whispered, "You've got to go back inside. Do not come out here. He shot himself in our car. He's dead. It's awful."

Cynthia looked at him with alarm. His face was white. "What are you talking about? Who shot himself in our car?"

Geoff, shaking, kept his voice low. "Now, dear, stay calm. It was Gardinier. Marius Gardinier killed himself in our car."

Cynthia gasped as her knees began to buckle. Geoff quickly grabbed her around the waist and pressed his other hand over her mouth. "Please stay calm. Remember our boys! Now, please go back inside. I have to make a call and you should probably get dressed..."

Cynthia sunk into a chair groaning softly. She put her face in her hands and began to sob while Geoff called his boss at his home. "Able, there's been a terrible accident."

Later, after Geoff put down the telephone, he saw that Randy was rapidly approaching the front door. Geoff grabbed Randy's shoulder just as he reached the doorway. With Geoff pulling him back, Randy managed to peek out the door towards the carport and saw the man sitting in their car with his head back.

Their duplex neighbors heard the shot, too, and Geoff's fellow agency colleague, Phil Watson, approached Geoff where he was trying to pull Randy back into the house. "What's going on Geoff? Judy and I heard what sounded like a gunshot and I thought I better come over to see if you're OK."

While Geoff was trying to formulate a quick response, Randy pulled on his arm and said, "Who is that man in our car, Daddy? What happened?"

Geoff shook his head and said, "Excuse me just a minute, Phil." Then he turned to Randy and said, "I don't know who the

man is and I need you to go back upstairs and you and Brian need to stay there until I call you." Randy gave him a puzzled look but reluctantly turned back toward the stairs.

After Randy had disappeared into his room Geoff turned back to Phil. "I don't know what happened. I just got off the phone with Able and he's sending the local police over. All I know is that it appears some man decided to take his life inside our car. Cynthia's upstairs now, getting dressed. I'm sure the police will want to talk to all of us. Able is also coming over… I can't explain any of this. It makes no sense." As he rambled these words, Geoff's glazed eyes stared off into the distance.

"Don't worry too much, Geoff. Who knows why people do what they do? If you don't know the man, then, surely, it won't affect you."

Geoff turned to Phil and blurted, "But that's just it. I do know the man. I didn't want Randy to know, but you'll hear anyway. That man over there is Marius Gardinier, a Frenchmen who teaches here in Phnom Penh."

Phil's eyes widened. "Isn't he the man who taught your wife to fly?" Geoff silently nodded his head. Phil blew out a breath and said, "Wow, Geoff, that's tough."

The police arrived and began examining the car and the body inside. Able and a couple of Embassy security officials arrived soon after. After the police asked a few questions and confirmed the name of the victim, the body was removed to a stretcher, covered with a sheet, and placed inside an ambulance. Cynthia and Geoff stood outside, near the front door. Phil Watson and his wife, Judy, stood near Cynthia and Geoff, trying to be supportive. Judy spoke to Cynthia, "I know this must be a terrible shock, but everything will return to normal soon, I'm sure."

Cynthia, her eyes red from crying, stood silently, barely listening. She could only think that nothing would ever be normal again. Cynthia recognized one of the embassy security men as the same CIA agent who had visited her a few weeks ago, Joe Hayden. She sucked in her breath and her hands began to tremble. She clutched them close to her body, her knuckles almost white with the effort.

The police arranged to have the car towed away for further examination, then they also left. Able and the security men remained, and after speaking in hushed tones for a few minutes, Able approached Geoff and Cynthia.

"Geoff, I know this has been a horrible morning, but I need you and Cynthia to come down to the office to answer some questions. The fact that you knew this man raises some concerns for our security people, so we'll need to get full statements from both of you." He looked at their stricken faces and continued, "Geoff, I'd like you to come with me now and we'll get this out of the way in no time." He turned to Cynthia. "Mrs. Stuart, could you be at my office by 9 a.m. tomorrow? I'll send a car for you."

"Of course." Cynthia replied, thinking that Able hadn't called her 'Mrs. Stuart' since the first time they met over four years ago. She clutched her hands tighter. This could be bad, unbelievably bad.

TRENTE-QUATRE

"My honest opinion and my friendly advice is this: do it or do not do it. You will regret both." Soren Kierkegaard

XXXIV. Phnom Penh. Evening, April 15, 1963

After Able dropped him off at the house close to dusk, Geoff felt wrung out. It had been an arduous, painful day and when Cynthia saw Geoff, the suffering was written across his face. She said, "I was beginning to worry, Dear. You were gone for so long. Let's sit down and have a drink. Dinner's almost ready." Geoff nodded and collapsed into his easy chair. His head hung against his chest and he barely looked up when she handed him his whiskey sour.

After a hushed dinner, Geoff took Cynthia out for a walk while the boys got ready for bed. It was their first chance for a private talk. Standing outside in the dark, Geoff turned to Cynthia. "What do you know about this? Why did Gardinier do this at our house? Tell me, Cynthia." He tried to keep his voice gentle, but the hurt and despair crept in.

"Do we have to talk about this now? It's been a horrible day, Geoff. I can't think straight and I'm so tired." Cynthia was desperate to avoid this conversation.

"No, I need to hear what you know about this. And I need to know now. You were close to him, maybe too close. Why did he come to our house, get in our car, and kill himself?"

He paused to catch his breath. "My career is at risk here, Cynthia. They asked me so many questions, about Gardinier, how close we were, about you… they kept pressing me. It was like they believed I was holding back something important. I thought I'd never get out of there. I felt like a criminal." He turned and looked into Cynthia's eyes. "Even the CIA was there! Tell me, what are they looking for? Do you know something about Gardinier?" He reached over and gripped Cynthia's hand.

"How should I know? I don't know why he did this any more than you do." She pulled her hand away and folded her arms across her chest. Her eyes focused on somewhere down the road, away from Geoff.

When she didn't continue, he said, "Was he in love with you? Were you having an affair?" Geoff's voice raised with each question, something he never did. His face contorted as he tried to control his emotions.

Cynthia bowed her head and sighed. She looked up at Geoff with hurt and rage. Unshed tears were in her eyes. "I'm surprised you could ask such a thing! Of course, there was no affair!"

"But why, Cynthia? Why would he do this?"

Cynthia looked up at the treetops and the lights of the city beyond. She quickly wiped at her eyes and took a deep breath. "Yes, Marius said he was in love with me. He begged me to go away with him and, of course, I said no!"

"Did you ever encourage him?"

"I swear to you I never did anything to encourage him. He would get flirtatious sometimes, but I never let him get away with anything. I always kept him in his place." She turned towards Geoff. "I never thought he was serious."

Geoff, his eyes wide, exclaimed, "Why didn't you tell me? I would have put a stop to it immediately. You should have never had to put up with that."

"Geoff, that's why I didn't tell you. If I'd said anything, my flying days would have been over two years ago! You'd never

have allowed me to buy a plane with him or go anywhere with him. He was the best pilot around here and all I wanted was to fly! I thought I could handle him."

"Well, obviously, you didn't. Are you sure you never encouraged him? For a man to take his own life over a flirtation…. Cynthia, that's hard to believe!" Cynthia said nothing.

Geoff looked up at the sky. The familiar sounds of chirping crickets and katydids in the trees filled the silence. It was a quiet neighborhood, and at night the street was peaceful. "Remember, you have your own interview coming up in the morning. I've got to be honest with you, Cynthia, this looks bad for us. Able didn't say anything directly, but the tone was deadly serious."

Cynthia looked at him in alarm. "Geoff, surely you told them that we had nothing to do with this! How can it affect us?" She sighed as they both stood quietly looking out into the distant lights of the city.

After a moment, Geoff continued, "Of course, it affects us. Everyone knows about all the time you spent with him. Don't be naïve! Don't you see how suspicious this looks? It was clear enough to me that they were concerned about your relationship with Gardinier."

"Well, I can't help what they think!" Cynthia's voice cracked with emotion and she took a deep breath. "I don't know why Marius would do such a thing ……. You know how intense he could get." She sighed again and turned back toward the duplex. "Can we go back now? I need to go to bed. I've got a splitting headache."

"Yes, we should check on the boys." Geoff felt exhausted. "We need to put this behind us as soon as possible." He caught Cynthia's hand and said, "Please be careful tomorrow. They grilled me and they won't be easy on you, either."

"Don't worry about me. There's nothing to be nervous about."

"Good. Once this is over, we'll never speak of it again. We need to protect the boys."

As they walked back to the house, Cynthia was filled with anxiety. Would the CIA man tell Able or Geoff what he knew?

What would they ask her? What could she say? What would happen to them? It was all her fault. She'd been stupid and selfish and everything that had happened was all her fault. She felt a wave of despair and worry as she'd never before experienced. She'd have to pull herself together and tough it out.

TRENTE-CINQ

"Hard truths can be dealt with, triumphed over, but lies will destroy your soul." Patricia Briggs

XXXV. US Embassy, Phenom Penh. April 16, 1963

Cynthia was ushered into a small conference room where Geoff's boss, Able Van Metz, and the CIA man, Joe Hayden sat waiting for her. Another security man, Sidney Peyton, was also there. A silver coffee carafe sat on the table and Able offered Cynthia a cup, which she turned down. "No thank you. I'd like to get right to your questions, please."

Able, looking old and tired, took the lead and began by asking Cynthia to detail her relationship with Marius. "I've known Mr. Gardinier since the spring of 1959 when I became one of his flying students. Later on, as I'm sure you know, we purchased a plane together that we used mainly to fly tourists or dignitaries to various places here in Cambodia. We were paid only enough to cover expenses." She looked pointedly at Able and said, "Of course, you remember that I donated my flights to Lamphot for the hospital there… carrying supplies and personnel…"

Able broke in. "Yes, we all know about that. How often were you and Mr. Gardinier together? How well did you get to know

him? Did he ever ask about Embassy personnel or projects?"

Cynthia looked around the room at the men, one by one, and said, "My relationship with Mr. Gardinier was a friendly one, of course, but it was entirely professional. He never asked about the Embassy. He never displayed any interest in any of that. In fact, I don't think he knew or cared what Geoff actually did." She went on to tell them about his background, careful to relate only what Marius had told her, that he came from an abusive home and, through his own initiative, was able to attend college and buy his first plane. She finished by saying that she was just as shocked as they were about Mr. Gardinier's suicide. "I have no idea at all why he did this horrible thing and why he chose our car."

It was at this point that, after a nod from Joe Hayden, Able excused himself, stood up, and left the room. Cynthia felt uncertain about what his departure meant. Her hands, which she held in her lap under the table began to tremble. After the door closed, Joe Hayden rose from his chair from across the table and moved to a chair closer to hers. He leaned his arms on the table and clasped his hands and gazed out the opposite window. He unclasped his hands and turned to face Cynthia.

"Mrs. Stuart, of course, you realize that I know all about your relationship with Mr. Gardinier. No one here is accusing you of any wrongdoing and it is not our intention to ruin your reputation… if possible. Neither Van Metz nor anyone in this agency is aware of your past 'special' relationship with Gardinier. However, because of certain past actions of Mr. Gardinier, Mr. Peyton and I have a few questions and we need the truth, not a repeat of the lies you've told us here this morning."

Cynthia gasped and shrunk back from Hayden. He continued, "We know that Gardinier took his own life yesterday morning. There is no evidence to suggest otherwise. We believe there are a couple of reasons for his choice of location for his suicide. First, he was distraught over your breakup with him. We know he'd been drinking heavily and following you. Second, we believe he was convinced that I and Mr. Peyton, here, were about to arrest him for transporting heroin from Burma into Thailand which was scheduled to be smuggled into the United States. Apparently, he

spotted one of our men who was tailing him two nights ago when he was riding his motorcycle near the river. He abandoned his bike and we believe he found his way to your house in the early hours of yesterday morning." He paused when Cynthia raised her hands to her mouth in shock. When she remained silent, he continued, "I have two questions for you."

"I'll try to answer to the best of my knowledge." Cynthia was clearly shaken and she took a deep breath to try to calm down.

"Did you know that he had made trips to Burma and Bangkok?"

"Yes. He told me after he returned. I didn't know anything about his plans beforehand. By the way, I told all this to Mr. Pelletier at the French embassy. "

"I understand. Did Gardinier tell you about the heroin or about who paid him for the job?"

"No, he didn't tell me anything about the heroin. He said he was working for some man who was moving his business and that he only carried boxes of documents." She paused a moment. "But he showed me a lot of cash. He just pulled it all out of his pockets and showed me, piles of it. I don't know how much he had. After that, I left as quickly as I could." Cynthia's voice choked with emotion and a single tear slid down her face, which she quickly wiped away. She shifted in her chair and squared her shoulders. She lifted her chin and clenched her teeth, her mouth a straight line. She was determined not to be browbeaten.

"Are you sure he didn't mention the name of the man he was working for?"

Cynthia, looking straight ahead, stated, "No, he didn't tell me. He wouldn't tell me anything like that. He only wanted the money so we could go away…. So that I would go away with him. But I ran away…. I ran away." Cynthia sobbed and her head dipped down briefly before she lifted it back up again, and stared straight ahead, looking at neither man.

The two men glanced at each other and looked back at Cynthia. Mr. Peyton, a beefy, middle-aged man with brown hair and glasses, had said nothing up to now. He stated, "I believe we have all we need, Mrs. Stuart." Cynthia looked at him then and

her mouth relaxed in relief. He continued, "However, as a representative of the US Embassy, it is my duty to tell you that your relationship with this Frenchman could have had dire consequences to the security of this Embassy and our country. I realize you were unaware of his background and that there was no way for you to know what he might have been capable of. However, you must understand that as a spouse of a Foreign Service Officer, you must hold yourself to a higher standard. Please conduct yourself accordingly in the future."

Cynthia nodded her head and said, "Yes, I will. I'm very sorry for the trouble I may have caused."

Both men stood up. Hayden extended his hand and said, "You may go. We have nothing further. We'll tell Mr. Van Metz that security was not breached at any time. Thank you for your cooperation."

Cynthia limply shook Hayden's hand. She looked up at Peyton, who had resumed his previous stony silence. He merely nodded.

Cynthia returned home and when Geoff asked about the interview, she only relayed the part which included Able van Metz. Even though Geoff seemed satisfied, the next few days were rough for him. Cynthia knew he was deeply worried about his career. He told her that Able seemed to have distanced himself and Geoff felt his career was hanging by a thread. The experience rattled him like nothing he'd ever encountered before. He'd never in all his life been subjected to such negative scrutiny.

Within a week, Geoff had orders for Bangkok. The family had to be packed and gone within two weeks. The Embassy wanted the gossip and whispers diffused immediately, and with the Stuarts out of the country, the talk would soon die down.

Cynthia bristled at the embassy's decision. "It's incredible that we're being punished in this way. We didn't do anything!"

"There's no appeal and if I want to keep a job at all, we have to move and make the best of it. You should be grateful that I wasn't demoted, let alone fired."

Geoff told Cynthia to never speak of the 'incident' again. Their lives were turned upside down, but they had to pretend they

were on stable ground. Their actions and behavior must demonstrate that nothing serious had ever happened.

Of course, as a true Southern Gentleman, he had been trained to keep negative things to himself and to never display his emotions. He believed it was rude and discourteous to let others see his discomfort or unhappiness. Difficult events were to be dealt with as soon as possible and hidden away. These guidelines applied to everyone in the family.

Any indiscretion that might reflect poorly on the family was not to be tolerated. Personal weaknesses were not discussed, and failures just didn't happen. The image of the ideal happy family must be preserved at all costs. In the weeks ahead Geoff intended to model that behavior not only to his peers but to those closest to him, his own family.

"Cynthia," he told her, "You've got to get rid of that damn plane. Don't ask me to buy out Gardinier's share." She couldn't stand losing her plane like this. It was like losing a part of herself. How she wanted to get into that plane and just fly away.

Geoff hardly spoke to her except for what was necessary. She began to realize how deeply he had been impacted. While his position would be the same in Bangkok, both he and Cynthia realized that they would be on a kind of probation. Their conduct must be above reproach going forward.

Cynthia felt a tremendous loss of purpose and direction. For the last few years, she had believed in her strength and her ability to win. She didn't know what or who to believe in now.

TRENTE-SIX

"We are all in this together, by ourselves." Lily Tomlin

XXXVI. Bangkok. 1963

When the Stuarts returned from their last home leave in October 1962, it was with the expectation of continued service in Cambodia. Now the family was uprooted and the boys were faced with a new school just as the summer break approached. Randy, at eleven, would enter the 5th grade in the Fall. Eight-year-old Brian would be ready for the 3rd grade. Again, Randy was excited about the move and looked forward to new adventures. Brian, who never did well with changes, was nervous about the new school and new surroundings.

Everything happened fast. Geoff and Cynthia were subdued, but Geoff tried to sound encouraging. "Bangkok is a much bigger, more modern city than Phnom Penh," he told them. "People don't speak much French here, so we'll have to adapt a little. But in many other ways, it's like what we're used to. I think we'll all be fine and feel at home in no time."

Their new house was located off Sukhumvit Road on Soi 1. Sukhumvit Road was the longest road in Bangkok and the sois were sub roads. The house was a short walk from one of the many

klongs, the canals that zig zag throughout the city, feeding off the mighty Chao Phraya River.

The two-story house had a long driveway, with grassy yards in front and back. There was a large deck off the spacious living room and a small balcony attached to one of the upstairs bedrooms. Randy chose that room, with his parents in the larger bedroom next door, with a bathroom in between. Brian took for his bedroom a small room on the ground floor near the maid's quarters. Large, flowering shrubs surrounded the yard for privacy.

They'd been in Bangkok for several weeks and the unpacking was still a work in progress. Boxes were piled in corners and only basic items had been put away. Even though the house had air conditioning units in the windows, Cynthia told Geoff that it was just too hot to set up their new home. He told her to find help. She managed to hire a houseboy/cook but the unpacking dragged on.

She complained she wasn't sleeping well and was tired all the time. Geoff testily suggested she see a doctor, but she insisted there wasn't anything physically wrong. The boys were in school now, so she had a good part of her days free. Yet, the boxes remained.

The energy she put into decorating their home in Phnom Penh was totally lacking. She didn't seem interested in getting her darkroom set up, either. When Geoff asked her about it, she answered, "Oh, I'll get to it sometime."

He had to remind her about her embassy 'calling' duties after his boss mentioned that his wife had not yet met Cynthia, implying a certain amount of disrespect. She seemed barely interested in his new duties or getting into a routine of her own.

Cynthia was so resentful of Geoff that she could hardly stand it. They'd been ripped from their home and moved with practically no notice. She had to sell her plane and it was clear she wouldn't be getting another one. He had his work, but what was she going to do with her time? She felt useless. Nothing inspired her, and she had so little energy.

She began to lie down for naps every afternoon, something she'd never done before. But she rarely slept. Instead, her

thoughts focused on her relationship with Marius, his complete devotion, his passion, and her happiness. The misery she felt was addictive. She constantly replayed her life in Phnom Penh and how it came crashing down in such a devastating way.

She was filled with regret and shame and there was nothing she could do about it. She couldn't talk to Geoff about it. She couldn't talk to anyone, even if she wanted to. He'd made that abundantly clear. It was like a recurring nightmare running behind her eyes, never stopping, with no relief. But Geoff... he could put it all behind him and lock it away. How could he do that? She supposed it was easy for him to put his thoughts on his new job, rather than think about her and how Marius's death changed all their lives.

Geoff and Cynthia rarely traveled, except to the beach once. They attended embassy functions. They joined a tennis club. There was an annual Festival of Light called Loi Krathong on the river which they took the boys to see, but that was the extent of it. Cynthia didn't get involved in outside activities and, except for embassy duties, they rarely went out just for fun.

Randy took the klong boats every day to school and back. Brian never went with him and he wasn't sure how Brian got to school, or if he went to school at all. Randy had so much fun on the klong, he didn't give it much thought. He never gave any thought to why Brian was so different. That's just the way it was.

The Stuarts were each in their own little world most of the time. Randy became interested in snakes when Geoff took him and Brian to the Snake Farm in Bangkok. Randy soon had his first snake, Vinnie, the Vine Snake, which was mildly poisonous. Randy read everything he could get his hands on about reptiles.

He often stayed after school and worked in the lab studying the snakes in glass jars. He dissected snakes and the teachers taught him how to use the formaldehyde to preserve them. Soon his upstairs bedroom was filled with jars of preserved snakes, and glass aquariums for his live snake collection: an Indian Water Snake and different types of pythons, all of which, except for Vinnie, were non-poisonous.

Geoff didn't like the snakes at all, and Cynthia tolerated them.

Brian was terribly afraid of them after he got bit when he put his hand inside a cage. It was a little startling the first time Randy woke up with a snake curled up at his feet or under his pillow, but he got used to it. They were just looking for warmth.

One of Randy's pythons, a recent acquisition and eleven feet long, broke out one night. Cynthia helped him catch it. Randy thought she was wonderful about helping and she didn't seem nervous or scared at all. She grabbed the tail and held on while Randy pinned the head and together, they stuffed it into a large burlap bag and shut it into the bathroom for the rest of the night.

The python was big enough to have found Brian a tasty meal, so the next day, Geoff and Randy built a big wooden cage that sat on the balcony outside. Within a week or two, the python broke out again. Randy found it next door wrapped around some electrical lines, electrocuted. No one in the family seemed much interested in his snakes or asked about them. As usual, Randy was on his own.

On the weekends, Randy got up before anyone else and left the house for the day. He'd buy a Fanta and an ear of roasted corn and take a klong boat to the outskirts of the city by the railroad tracks. He liked to walk up and down the tracks, explore around, spending most of the day by himself with his imagination.

No one ever questioned where he was all day or cautioned him about wandering around on his own. No one seemed to realize how crazy it was for an eleven-year-old American boy to be wandering alone in a third-world country. It was normal to him.

The boys finally got their bicycles that first Christmas in Bangkok. Randy's was a beauty, too, and Geoff didn't have to put it together this time. Randy was interested in music and received his first Beatles 45s. He also loved to listen to Benny Goodman, Gene Krupa, and Glenn Miller on the Hi-Fi. He wanted to grow his hair long and asked for a pair of Beatles boots.

But even with the nice Christmas, they were living a superficial existence. The Stuart family was disconnected from one another and rarely talked. If Randy wasn't up in his room with his snakes or at school, he was listening to music or wandering the klongs.

Brian lived in an isolated world of his own, as well. He was

fascinated with how things worked. When the Hi-Fi change arm quit working, Brian took it apart and put it back together again as good as new. Geoff focused on his work and Cynthia made sure the houseboy did his job and took care of the house. She read and took walks. No one seemed to notice what the other was doing…. Or care. There was little laughter.

Randy had a picture pinned up on his wall. A street photographer took a picture of the family standing in front of their little car on a busy street in Bangkok. Geoff, Brian, and Randy are looking at the camera with small smiles. Cynthia, looking thin and wearing her dark glasses, is looking away down the street, unsmiling.

Randy quit going to church with the family after they moved to Bangkok. They weren't attending that often, and Randy said it was a waste of time. No one objected.

After the family had been in Bangkok for about a year, Cynthia was still living in a world of misery and self-recrimination. She made feeble attempts from time to time to focus on something other than memories of Marius and her responsibility for his downfall and death. But the darkness of it enveloped her with tentacles of steel from which she couldn't shake free. The darkness became a sort of rough, prickly blanket, which became a self-imposed punishment, not unlike a figurative flagellation. That prickly blanket also offered a weird kind of protection. It was easier to pull it over her head than to step out into the blinding light of her failures.

Her unpredictable bouts of anger continued to reign, especially with Randy. He could never predict when some small infraction might result in beatings that filled him with terror and anguish. While wielding her tool of discipline, a wooden hairbrush, she screamed her anger at Randy. For Randy, the screaming was worse than the beating.

He was always in trouble for teasing Brian, but none of the teasing was cruel or beyond what most normal siblings experienced. For some reason unknown to Randy, Brian was protected and coddled, and Randy naturally felt duty-bound to

tease him in return. One time after she severely beat Randy with the brush, complete with ear-piercing screams, Cynthia felt so guilty that she searched Bangkok and bought a Beatles album for him. The hug and kiss she got in return made her feel worse.

A day or two later, when Cynthia was alone in the house, she received a letter that had been forwarded from her mother. The letter was from a woman she knew at Grenoble, who had sent it to Cynthia's parents, in hopes it would find its way to her.

"Dear Cynthia: Bonjour! Do you remember me, Mila, from the University at Grenoble? I was thinking about you and wondering about your life. I know you planned to live in Paris and pursue an important career, but the last I knew you were trying to decide whether to marry that handsome man, Geoffrey something, you know, who was always after you! But knowing how determined you were back then, I just bet you went to Paris instead! I was in Paris recently, but I had no idea how to find you. I'm sure you have a fabulous career and your own apartment with men dying of love for you. Tell me, did you ever find that one, special man, the one you finally fell for? Geoffrey was so polite and nice, but I could tell you weren't in love with him. I envied you sometimes because you were so confident, so sure of what you wanted. I'm sure you are the same way now."

Mila continued on about her own life and that she was happily married with three children. She lived in a small town near Marseille and invited Cynthia to visit. Cynthia read the letter again, not noticing the tears that had come suddenly to her eyes. She folded the letter and put it back into the envelope which she placed in her dresser drawer underneath her nightgowns, the same place she kept the bracelet that Marius had given her.

She walked out to the front deck and sat down on one of the wicker chairs, as if in a fog. "What has happened to me, to my life?" she whispered. " I was once a determined, confident person. But if that was true, why didn't I go to Paris?" She thought a moment. "Because I was scared. I was scared of doing without, of having no money, and having to sacrifice like my mother. I wanted everything to be easy, on my own terms. Maybe…maybe I just didn't want it badly enough."

The tears started again as she sat looking out onto her carefully tended front yard in Bangkok. Her teak Hi-Fi that had been specially built was sitting in the living room. Her teak dining set and hutch was in the dining room, the hutch filled with expensive china and glassware. The portrait she had painted in Cambodia was hanging on the wall. Cynthia rose from her chair and walked back into the living room and stood before the painting.

It was a large painting, a four by six-foot oil, beautifully framed. The portrait depicted an elegant setting, with Cynthia seated on a Louis XV armchair, which was upholstered in deep navy velvet. She wore a silky, off-the-shoulder, pale green gown with a golden sash. One hand rested in her lap with the other draped languidly off the chair armrest. Her golden-brown hair was styled in her signature French twist. Her almond-shaped, blue eyes were the most arresting feature of the painting. There was only a hint of a smile.

"I sold my soul for this. I defiled my marriage and caused an innocent man's death for this. I make my husband miserable and I neglect my children. What kind of a person am I? I wish I knew."

TRENTE-SEPT

"Not until we are lost do we begin to understand ourselves." Henry David Thoreau

XXXVII. Bangkok. August 1964

The Stuarts believed they had adjusted to life in Bangkok even though that life was one of detachment and superficiality. Geoff, who acclimated well to his new position, felt very confident that he would soon be offered a promotion. So, he wasn't surprised when he received a message one afternoon to report to his superior's office. Geoff entered the office, smiling and assured as he took a seat. He reconsidered when he saw his boss's face. He was not smiling and, in fact, looked extremely solemn.

Geoff soon learned that a message had been received about a death in the family. It was Geoff's younger brother, Edward. Edward was driving home from a business trip when, apparently, he fell asleep. The car went off the road and flipped, killing him instantly. Edward had just passed the bar and was in private practice with a prestigious Virginia law firm. Now he was dead.

Geoff felt gut-punched. He and Edward had always been close, even as children. As adults, they'd spent as much time together as possible. They'd always had each other's backs,

especially those times when their father had been drinking. Geoff felt he couldn't get his breath. His legs seemed to turn to jello.

Noticing his suddenly white face, his boss told Geoff to take the rest of the day off. "I'm sorry about this, Geoff, but you understand we can't let you return to the states right now. Maybe later we can arrange some time off for you to visit." Geoff understood. That was the life of an FSO. Geoff turned and stumbled out of the office. A black cloud descended over him.

Somehow, he managed to find his way home. Cynthia was in the dining room, setting the table for dinner. She looked up at him as he came in. His eyes seemed wild as they shifted around the room. He must have run his hands through his hair since it was in disarray. "What's wrong, Geoff?" His eyes came to rest on her, but then quickly darted away. His mouth worked, but nothing came out. "Geoff, what is it? What's wrong?"

As the words formed in his mouth, "My brother's dead", he crumbled. He slumped down at the dining room table, put his head in his hands, and cried out as if he'd been stabbed.

Cynthia came to his side and placed her hand gently on his shoulder. "Oh no! Edward is dead? How?"

Geoff raised his head and looked at her accusingly as if this was somehow her fault. "A car accident. He fell asleep at the wheel and now he's dead! Cynthia, how can I go on without him? He always understood me, he loved me! No one else loved me like he did, not you, not anybody." Geoff lowered his head again and cried as if his heart was broken. "Now I have no one."

Cynthia stepped back, feeling the sting of his indictment. She felt powerless to comfort him. Randy and Brian came in after hearing the unfamiliar sounds. They stood there, all three of them, watching Geoff doubled over across the table as he wept. The boys were horrified. They had never seen their father this way and the image of it was forever imprinted in their minds.

Seeing Geoff's inconsolable grief, Cynthia saw a glimmer of how her selfishness had deeply wounded everyone in her family. Geoff felt unloved and discarded. Randy and Brian were afraid of her. None of them deserved this. She had taken Geoff's love and abused it. The possessions, accolades, and praise she collected like

personal trophies had been worth more to her than her own family, her husband, and her sons. They should have been nurtured and loved but were instead belittled and carelessly cast aside.

Cynthia remembered a little saying an old nun had taught her: 'God First, Others Second, Myself Last.' At the time she could barely contain her scorn. But now it haunted her.

Geoff often told his colleagues that he found Thailand somewhat dull compared to Cambodia. But it wasn't because of any lack of beautiful sights and impressive history, but because his family was barely functioning. They were on autopilot. It was a dark time that they wanted to forget. After his two-year term was completed, he requested and received a transfer.

TRENTE-HUIT

"When you're finished changing, you're finished." Benjamin Franklin

XXXVIII. Rabat, Morocco. June 1965

Geoff's diligent work and the family's low profile while in Thailand had paid off. He received a promotion to lead economic development of the agricultural and industrial sectors under the American AID program. After spending almost seven years in Southeast Asia, the family now had to adapt to an Arab environment.

The Stuarts settled in Kenitra, about an hour away from Rabat. They moved into the house vacated by his old boss, Able van Metz, and his family. Able had been promoted and transferred, and Geoff took his place.

Cynthia decided to send the boys to visit their Grandmother Stuart in Georgia for the summer. It would be a good change for the boys and they could help her around the farm. With the boys away the couple had time to focus on each other and their new surroundings. They still didn't speak about the 'incident' and its impact, but they fell into a genial, agreeable relationship. It was never again like it had once been, but it was better than Bangkok.

After years of keeping her hair long, worn in a French twist, Cynthia cut her hair short and had it permed into soft curls. She didn't want to see the same face in the mirror anymore. She still mourned her old life and the death of Marius but felt less sad and she intentionally determined to go forward, rather than wallow in her past. She told herself that she and Geoff could still have a good life.

Cynthia slowly began to see the light at the end of her long, dark tunnel. Geoff's promotion, prestige, and new, exotic surroundings helped. Geoff didn't question her suggestion to send the boys away for the summer. It made things simpler and less stressful for her. If she was less stressed, so was he. He was encouraged that the dark days of Bangkok seemed to have receded. She quickly threw herself into unpacking and fixing up the house. She even talked of setting up a darkroom for her photography.

Geoff found that his affection for Cynthia was changed. He was committed to their marriage but didn't think that he would ever feel comfortable or truly happy again. The trust was gone. Having filed away the thing about the suicide, unanswered questions haunted him.

He never contemplated divorce. Geoff followed rules and believed strongly that divorce would indicate a great personal failure that he could never accept. He decided that even though the 'for better' part may be gone, it didn't mean that he could just walk away now that things seemed to be 'for worse'.

Cynthia realized that Geoff had every right to divorce her and send her back to Kansas City. Even though he never discussed such an idea, she still felt as if she were walking a tightrope. She had treated him shabbily and the remorse she felt spurred her to be a better, more attentive wife. She hoped that over time that Geoff could somehow forgive her.

She greeted Geoff at the door each evening with a cocktail and a nice dinner. She wanted him to forget that horrible day and her part in it. She had nothing to go back home to and she couldn't bear the stigma of divorce. Even though she was still in her thirties, she began to worry about being middle-aged and alone.

Thankfully, Geoff never talked about it. Even so, she still felt ill at ease knowing that Geoff now had a power over her that she'd never felt before. What if he met someone else? Things were upside down. Instead of his needing her, she now needed him. It was a queer feeling.

Talking about their true feelings was out of the question. Geoff and Cynthia chose to keep quiet and try to make the best of things. Keep the peace. Stay calm. Don't discuss unpleasant things. Have a cocktail and smile. It will all be OK.

Before long, the summer was over, and the boys were brought to their new home in Morocco. Randy was enrolled in the 7th grade at Thomas Mack Wilhoit School at the Naval base in Kenitra. Brian went into the 5th grade. They were glad to be back with their parents.

Things were different, but they all found their groove. Randy still got in trouble for picking on Brian, and he seemed restless much of the time. His grades were not what they should be, and Cynthia talked to Geoff about it. "How can we help Randy with his studies? We know he's intelligent, but his grades should be a lot better."

Geoff was flabbergasted at Cynthia's concern. This was new for her. "I'm not sure that the problem isn't pure laziness! He just needs to buckle down, study more and get his homework done on time. He spends too much time listening to his records and hanging around with those so-called friends of his."

"One thing we could do, I guess…we can try to help him get his homework done. Maybe I could call his teachers to find out what assignments he has so I can hold him accountable and help if he needs it."

"Cynthia, my parents never did that when I was his age. Randy needs to learn to be responsible to get his work done on his own. We can't hold his hand all his life."

"You never moved around or lived in foreign countries like Randy has, either," she responded. Geoff put his paper down and looked up at her.

"I still say he's just lazy. But I guess if you want to help him, it won't do any harm. Just as long as he does the work. Don't do

it for him! I've been thinking that if he doesn't improve soon that a year in a good military academy may be just what he needs."

"Well, I guess that's something we can think about, but....let's see how the next year or two goes." She rose from her chair. "I'll go talk to Randy, now."

They joined the Officers' Club at the base where they went for tennis or dinner from time to time. Cynthia hired household help and began going to the library at the Embassy to study up on the Arabian culture and language that was so fascinating to her.

Of course, because of Geoff's position, she had more duties with Embassy functions but continued to avoid entertaining in their home. Evening cocktails were routine, but friends or co-workers were rarely invited. It was usually just the two of them.

They soon had a comfortable routine. Cynthia put out the special Hurricane glasses, the ones they'd gotten in New Orleans, and put an album on the Hi-Fi. Geoff prepared the drinks and they sat in the living room reviewing Geoff's day before they called the boys in for a quiet dinner, prepared by the cook.

Their social life consisted of Embassy functions for visiting dignitaries, or, from time to time, a traditional Moroccan feast or festival. As a woman, Cynthia wasn't always allowed to attend, depending on who was hosting and the time of day. Mid-day feasts were sometimes acceptable for wives to be in attendance. Traditions and customs must be followed to demonstrate respect when attending these events. Geoff and Cynthia were careful to adhere to the etiquette of the culture.

Randy was fascinated with the stories his father related about the Moroccan feasts he attended. Sometimes it was a party for no special reason, or sometimes the feast was to commemorate a special event or to entertain a special guest. His dad said the feast was held in a big banquet room which was arranged with low benches around the room in a circle together with low cushions. Guests could sit on the floor or low benches or cushions. Small, low tables were scattered about among the guests. Women served the food, always a large variety of dishes, colorful and deliciously spicy and appetizing.

Guests ate with the right hand only, using the thumb and the first two fingers. Using more would demonstrate gluttony, which was extremely rude behavior. It was important to never eat too much but to praise the quantity and quality of the food. When the desserts were served, belly dancers came swaying and gyrating into the room clinking their finger cymbals, moving among the guests. The dancers were accompanied by men playing drums such as a Bendira and a Darbouka, as well as a five-stringed instrument called an Oud, similar to a lute.

Of course, one of the highlights of Moroccan hospitality was the mint tea ceremony. Randy listened in rapt attention as his father described the ancient ceremony.

"Boys, this ceremony is very special and goes back hundreds of years. Each guest has a small glass containing raw sugar cubes and fresh mint leaves. The host ceremoniously rinses the teapot before adding boiling water to fresh mint and dried green tea leaves. After steeping, the tea is poured into each guest's glass. While pouring, he raises the teapot to a height of twelve inches or more above the glass." Geoff raised his hand over his shoulder. "Can you imagine?" Randy smiled as he nodded vigorously.

"Then after the feast, each guest must belch to show his approval. Or they may even take a nap!" Randy was flabbergasted.

"I wish I could go some time," Randy said.

"Maybe someday when you're older.

TRENTE-NEUF

"He who has a why to live can bear almost any how." Nietzsche

XXXIX. Morocco. Christmas 1965

Cynthia decided to take the boys camping on the beach on the Mediterranean coast for their first Christmas in Morocco. They pitched a tent and cooked over an open fire. Geoff, still getting established in his new position, drove up on the weekends.

They brought a big rubber raft along, and they looked forward to a relaxing, stress-free time on the beach and playing in the surf. They had the whole beach to themselves.

The boys explored and swam while Cynthia dozed in the sun and read. Randy brought along a spear gun, and he spent quite a bit of time honing his fishing skills. He caught a small octopus, which Cynthia cooked for them.

She taught Randy how to snorkel and found he excelled at it. "Randy, I'm planning to take scuba diving lessons soon."

"Really, Mom? That is so cool. I would love to learn to scuba dive."

"Well, the next time we come to the beach, I'll teach you. We can probably rent the equipment and we'll have a wonderful time together." Randy gave her a smile and a big hug. Randy was a

hugger, she thought with a smile. She had no idea who he learned it from. Brian was usually stiff as a board, and Geoff's hugs, while he was more affectionate these days, were few and far between.

Her thoughts turned to Brian, whose stutter was still a problem. She and Geoff always believed he'd grow out of it, but at eleven years old, he still barely spoke. His teachers were concerned about his reading comprehension, too. She wondered what she could do to help him. She decided she would talk with someone at the medical clinic at the Naval base.

Cynthia enjoyed taking the rubber raft out into the surf where she paddled out away from the beach into deep water. The waves were gentle and in no time, she was far out from shore. She looked back and could barely see the campsite. The peace was heavenly with the sounds of the waves and the birds flying above.

One time while paddling out, dolphins suddenly surrounded her. She stopped paddling, hoping the dolphins wouldn't capsize the raft. She sat still, holding her breath, nervously wondering what would happen next. The dolphins began to circle her raft. There must have been five or six swimming around and around.

Suddenly one dolphin leaped in the air and jumped over her. It was startling and somewhat scary, but as one after the other circled and then jumped over her raft, she realized they were just playing. She began to laugh as the dolphins continued their playful antics. After a while, they all swam away. Cynthia smiled, sighed, and thought to herself, "They were flying, just like I used to do. I hope I can fly again someday, too."

After a year in Kenitra, the Stuarts moved to housing in Rabat, a two-story house, which was within walking distance of the Embassy and more convenient for Geoff.

Cynthia loved living in town, but there would have to be adjustments for the boys' schooling. Brian began attending the American School in Rabat, but Randy continued school at the naval base in Kenitra because he wanted to remain with his friends. Geoff and Cynthia agreed, even though it meant he had to endure a long bus ride, two hours round trip, every day.

Randy got up early to catch the bus, and he didn't get home

until almost 6 p.m. It was a long day. Randy adjusted, but Cynthia worried he wasn't getting enough sleep. He told her that most of the kids did their homework on the bus. She was afraid that instead of starting it on the way home, Randy let it slide until the next morning.

When Cynthia wasn't worried about how she could help her boys, she immersed herself in learning Arabic and studying at the library. She loved reading about the Sahara Desert, its history, and its people. When she was at the library, she felt safe. She was there so often she began shelving materials and helping other patrons.

It was peaceful and fulfilling. She didn't have to think about Brian and his problems. She didn't have to think about Randy being too much like her. She didn't have to think about Geoff and their shaky marriage. She knew her motivation to please Geoff was based on fear. She wanted that to change, but she didn't know how. How could she reach him? How could he forgive her if they both refused to talk about the 'incident'?

She sometimes resented the part she played with Geoff day in, day out. It was always the same. "Good evening, Dear. How was your day? How's your latest project progressing? Dinner will be ready soon. Yes, I would love a Hurricane. Thank you, Dear. What would you like on the Hi-Fi tonight? *Fiddler on the Roof* or *The Sound of Music*? That would be lovely. Yes, my day was fine. The boys are fine. Fine, fine.

QUARANTE

"If you judge people, you have no time to love them." Mother Theresa

XL. September 1967

Randy was looking forward to his freshman year in high school. He had made many friends, both at the school as well as in Rabat. He loved to socialize with the locals and go down to the souk, the colorful, noisy marketplace in the Medina, the old town center of Rabat. He loved that he could speak in French again and even began to pick up some Arabic.

However, his father had other ideas. Both his parents were worried that Randy's academic progress wasn't exactly stellar. No matter what Cynthia tried, she was told by his teachers that Randy seemed distracted and couldn't sit still. His choice of some of the boys he hung around with in Rabat was also concerning. His interest in girls and music was getting stronger every day and attitudes toward women by Moroccan young men was not a trait they wanted Randy to emulate. He was turning into a tall, handsome young man with a ready smile and an easy-going manner. Geoff felt he needed molding and discipline.

Geoff made some inquiries about military academies, and after

receiving a brochure sent by one of his cousins, Geoff decided on a small school in central Virginia.

The brochure said: "Transform your teen! Is he failing academically? Is he exhibiting rebellious behavior? Is he defiant and disrespectful? Send your son to us and we will turn his life around."

Cynthia reacted. "Geoff, this is not our son! Yes, he could do better in school, but he's not defiant or rebellious. He's never been disrespectful to me. Does he seem that way to you?"

"Well…no, he usually does what he's told and he's polite with us and others. But you have to admit, a little discipline couldn't be bad for him. What harm could it do?" Knowing nothing about military academies, Cynthia reluctantly agreed.

Randy was packed up and put on a plane to the States, with instructions to work hard and follow orders. He hated leaving his friends and parents, but he never questioned their decision. While Randy had always been independent and high-spirited, he never intentionally defied his parents. If they thought this was best, who was he to question it?

Randy's Aunt Joyce, Uncle Edward's widow, picked him up at the airport. She had remarried and their new home was about sixty miles from the school. She took Randy home with her where he spent a couple of days with their family before she drove him down to the military academy.

After making sure he was in good hands, his aunt hugged him and said she'd pick him up for Christmas. With a sad look, she got back into her car and drove out of the gate. She looked in the rear-view mirror and saw Randy still standing on the sidewalk, looking bereft and unhappy. She also saw an older cadet angrily yelling at him.

Randy's letters were not filled with fun experiences or new friends or how much he loved being in a military academy. He sounded more like a fifteen-year-old boy trying desperately to get through each depressing day. He wrote about the endless military drills, the regimentation, his older cadet roommates who liked to pick on him, and how he never had any privacy. He apologized for not writing more often and wondered if they would come out

to see him at Christmas.

Cynthia felt sad when she read those letters. She wondered if they had done the right thing, but there was nothing she could do now. She had survived a Catholic girl's academy. Randy could survive this, too. In the meantime, she decided to focus on Brian. She convinced Geoff to go with her and Brian to the Air Force Base in Ramstein, Germany. The doctor at the Naval base said they had a good team of specialists that may be able to diagnose Brian's problems.

After batteries of tests, the result came back that Brian probably had a social disorder that prevented him from interacting well with others, especially teachers or those in authority. He could read, but he had to read sections over and over again to grasp their meaning. Geoff, highly skeptical, asked them, "Is he backward or something?"

"You couldn't be more wrong, Mr. Stuart. Brian is actually gifted in certain narrowly defined skills, as I'm sure you've noticed. He just needs more time processing the written word and his social skills are poor. But he is not backward. With the right training focused on Brian's particular aptitudes, he has the promise of being quite successful in life."

While Geoff sneered at what the doctors told them, Cynthia was anxious to find out what she could do to help her boy. "Tell me how I can help him, especially with overcoming his stutter."

Armed with information on speech therapy exercises and other tools to help Brian with his academic problems, they flew back to Rabat. While Cynthia felt more confident about Brian, Geoff told her, "I just can't buy that line those doctors tried to sell us about Brian being 'gifted'. Yes, he can tear a clock apart and put it back together again, but in every other way, he's like a six-year-old child."

Cynthia was defiant. "Well, I don't care what you think, I'm going to follow their suggestions. I want to help Brian succeed. He's almost thirteen and we've ignored this thing too long. We have to try."

When the school year ended in May, Randy flew back home

to Morocco. It was 1968 and he was 16 years old. He'd been isolated in a punitive military academy for nine months. He felt he'd just gotten out of jail and was happy to be home again.

His positive demeanor back in force, Randy got reacquainted with old friends and once again began hanging out at the souk. Geoff didn't have much to say but Cynthia tried to engage him in conversation and get to know her grown-up-looking son.

"Randy, you've grown so much since last year! And look at you… you've lost your 'baby fat' and you look so handsome and strong." Randy's face flushed as he smiled back at her. She put her hand up to his face briefly. "It looks like it won't be long before you'll be shaving every day, too." She paused and said, "Son, I know it wasn't always pleasant there, but did you have any positive experiences…. Something that you enjoyed doing?"

Randy put his hand to his chin and thought a moment. "Well… I have to admit I learned how to study. I took a speed-reading course, too. I think those things will really help me in school and college later on."

Cynthia was impressed. "That's wonderful! But those are academic things. What did you do for fun?"

"I joined the radio club. The thing I liked most was that I got to be a disc jockey for the school radio program that the club produced. I loved it! Our radio studio was up in the old bell tower. I could play all kinds of music and talk about music and the artists. I also read the academy news and events. I had a regular shift when I was up there all alone. It was heaven." Cynthia told him how proud she was and that he should tell his father all about it. But Randy shook his head and said, "I don't think he'll be too interested in that stuff."

Randy began picking up some extra money by 'hawking' the tourists for the local vendors in the souk. American and English-speaking tourists spent the most money, so a friendly American teenager was a perfect marketing tool. It was a lot of fun and energizing. Randy didn't get in trouble. He didn't smoke or do drugs. He was puzzled by the change in his mom's attitude. She used to be the one mad at him all the time. Now it seemed his Dad preferred to ignore him.

QUARANTE ET UN

"Mine honor is my life; both grow in one; Take honor from me, and my life is done." William Shakespeare

XLI. Rabat. August 1968

During the time that Randy had been away at school, Geoff and Cynthia befriended the man who drove Brian's bus to the American School in Rabat. He was a former champion boxer, but humble and courteous. Gentle and kind, he looked after Brian and made sure no one picked on him. Cynthia even began giving him reading and writing lessons in return for help with her Arabic. Short and sturdy as a redwood tree trunk, his massive shoulders were imposing. His hands were like sledgehammers, and his twisted face and smashed nose told the story of his years in the ring.

Geoff was sure he would be the perfect man to teach Randy how to box. Geoff wanted to direct his son's energies into something positive which would also keep him from hanging around the souk all the time. The man was desperately poor, living with his family in a run-down house, not much better than a shack. It made Geoff feel good to offer him the job of training his son.

When he first met Ahmed, Randy thought he looked like a

brown gnome, with his short stature and massive, muscled physique. His shoulders seemed to be at least five feet wide. His dad had told him about Ahmed's background, and he was excited to learn from a real, professional boxer.

Ahmed got right to it, immediately taking Randy outside to run. He said that boxing was hard work and took a lot of persistence. He told Randy he needed to be able to run far and run hard to build up strength and stamina. Randy felt a little disappointed. He thought they would get into the ring right away so he could begin to learn how to punch and navigate around an opponent. That would come later, Ahmed said in French. "Maintenant, en va courir!" Now we're going running!

Randy soon learned that Ahmed's workouts were not exactly a walk in the park. He felt like a limp dishrag by the time they were finished with a workout session. Geoff had arranged for Ahmed to work with Randy on the weekends, or as often as he could find the time. He often showed up at daybreak, way too early for a teenage boy who liked to stay up late.

If Randy was still in bed, Ahmed yanked on his arm, literally pulling him up. Randy took to hiding under the bed, but that didn't stop Ahmed. With one meaty hand, he grabbed Randy's ankle and hauled him out, chastising his laziness all the while.

Week by week, month by month, Ahmed diligently worked with Randy, encouraging him and teaching him how to box. But Randy learned something else, too. Not only did he learn what it meant to be a boxer, but, by Ahmed's example, he learned what it meant to be a man of honesty and principle.

Ahmed told him that he should never, under any circumstances, use his training to bully or push someone around. "Never use your strength or your smarts to hurt someone weaker. There is no honor in that!" Ahmed was stern and looked Randy in his eyes as he spoke. Randy could tell he was deadly serious.

Ahmed once asked Randy what he wanted to do when he was a grown man. Randy remembered a comment he'd overheard when his parents were discussing his future. His dad had said, "With his poor math skills, Randy won't amount to much." It had cut him to the quick.

Now Randy looked into Ahmed's face and responded, "Oh, I don't know that I can do anything special. You know I sell things at the souk sometimes. Maybe I'll just do that."

Ahmed's eyes popped open wide as Randy shifted his head away from Ahmed's stare. "Is selling trinkets in the souk good enough for a young man like you? I don't think so! You can do anything, my friend!" Ahmed shook his finger at Randy. "If you work hard enough," Ahmed repeated, "you can do anything! You must never give up on anything that is important to you."

Randy watched Ahmed with his family, too. There was no question that Ahmed was the patriarch of his family. It was also obvious how much he loved them. He always told Randy the truth, sometimes brutally so. He was uneducated and simple, but Randy came to understand that he had a kind of pure honesty that was exceedingly rare.

Randy didn't fully grasp every lesson he learned from Ahmed that year. But while he held his own in the boxing ring, even when he thought his nose was broken, Randy instinctively learned what Ahmed modeled, something more valuable than how to fight: integrity and honor. The more Randy was around Ahmed, the more he respected him.

Cynthia also observed these qualities in Ahmed and as she noticed positive changes in her son's behavior and attitudes, she began to realize that Ahmed wasn't only teaching Randy how to box, but how to live. She was grateful that her son was being mentored by this kind, humble man.

Over time Cynthia began to notice changes within herself, too. As she turned her energies outward to others' needs, she felt more content and peaceful. She was pleased that Brian's speech was improving. She realized he may always have problems with a stutter, but she taught him coping mechanisms to deal with it. She took pride in that. The old Cynthia would have continued to ignore or deny any issues with her sons. She was grateful that old Cynthia was fading away.

QUARANTE-DEUX

"Of all the paths you take in life, make sure a few of them are dirt." John Muir

XLII. Sahara Desert. December 1969

From the time the Stuarts arrived in Morocco, Cynthia studied the Sahara Desert and worked hard to learn Arabic. The more she learned, the more fascinating the Sahara was to her. She convinced Geoff that they had to see it firsthand.

"I want this to be the best time our family has ever spent together, Geoff. I know that things have been strained between us for a long time…" she reached for his hand. Geoff shook his head, but she continued, "and I want this trip to be one not only of adventure but of healing in our family. I want your forgiveness, Geoff, for the horrible way I've treated you, how I hurt you…"

Geoff broke in and said, "Cynthia…" Geoff hesitated briefly while he looked down at her hand clasped in his. "I want things to be better, too. Maybe this trip could bring us all back together." She realized she was trembling with emotion. Cynthia leaned over and gently kissed him as he put his arms around her. "But this trip will be challenging, Cynthia. People have died crossing the Sahara."

"We can do it, Geoff. I know with all of us helping each other, we can do it."

They planned to make the trip during the Christmas holidays in 1969, allowing three weeks for the cross-country excursion. They would first drive to Algiers and then turn south across the desert to Tamanrasset, in southern Algeria, which originated as a hub of multiple camel caravan trading routes. While the summer temperatures could reach as high as 117 degrees Fahrenheit, average temperatures in December should be in the low 80s.

They started planning and stocking up months in advance. Cynthia oversaw the food and planned everything meticulously. She measured out dry ingredients to be cooked with water or canned soup over campfires. She collected a variety of canned meat and vegetables and other non-perishable items. Three weeks of travel through the Sahara required adequate food and water. There would be no roadside cafes or grocery stores along the way. At least, they couldn't count on it.

Geoff got to work modifying their VW camper. He planned to bring five jerry cans of extra gasoline as well as three plastic five-gallon water jugs which would add 40 gallons of weight to the roof. He also packed a case of motor oil for frequent oil changes. Of course, they would need a variety of tools in addition to normal camping gear. With everything finally loaded, the family wedged inside the camper and drove out of Rabat on December 20, 1969.

They drove north of Rabat to a camping spot near the town of Oujda, Morocco. Camp was set up and they had dinner. As darkness descended, they all crawled into their sleeping bags for the night. But Cynthia soon noticed that something was wrong with Geoff. He was shaking with cold, his face beaded in sweat. "Geoff, what's wrong?" She put her hand to his head. "You're burning up!"

"Malaria attack." He weakly stuttered. Cynthia pulled out another blanket and tried to make him comfortable, but he had a very restless night. The next morning his fever was down only slightly, and he was very weak. Cynthia and the boys felt they needed to turn back, but Geoff insisted it would pass and they should press on. The boys helped Cynthia load everything back

into the camper.

With Geoff bundled in the passenger seat, Cynthia got behind the steering wheel and turned the key to start the engine. It wouldn't start. The battery was dead. "Fine, what else now?" Cynthia muttered. The VW had a standard transmission, so she told the boys to try to push the camper while she cranked the motor. Randy and Brian jumped out, and ignoring Cynthia's protests, Geoff joined them behind the vehicle. They pushed until the VW was rolling and suddenly, the engine roared to life. The guys ran up and jumped in as the VW slowly rolled along. Cynthia steered them into Oujda where they bought and installed a replacement battery. Before long, they were on the road again, headed for the Algerian border.

Geoff, still unwell, crawled into his sleeping bag in the back as they drove along. His chills were so strong that his shaking rocked the camper. More covers were piled on top of him and he finally dropped off to sleep. Before they completed the hours-long customs and crossing procedures, Geoff had sweated away his fever and was soaking wet. Once he washed up and put on dry clothing, he felt like a new man. Cynthia put his sleeping bag out to dry while they continued to wait for the customs officials to approve their passports. Geoff commented, "I've heard that these officials sometimes 'accept' remuneration to speed up the process."

Cynthia looked at the officials leisurely standing nearby. "We have time. What do you say we just wait them out?"

Geoff replied with a wry smile, "Sounds good to me. It will give us time for my sleeping bag to dry out." The officials eventually gave up and finally stamped their passports and waved them through.

About 70 miles from the Moroccan border their first stop in Algeria was Tlemcen, an ancient city founded in the 2nd century by the Romans. From there they traveled to Laghouat, camping out along the way. Then they proceeded south about 100 miles south to Ghardaia. They made good time on a well-maintained French-built blacktop. The city was delightful with colorful markets and friendly people. They restocked their supplies and

purchased two large sand mats. Geoff knew these tough mats, woven from coconut fibers, may come in handy in the days ahead.

After topping off their gasoline and water supply, the family was back on the road south. The topography began to change over the next 150 miles. Sand dunes appeared and at times they crossed over areas of the road which were covered with wind-blown sand. Camels became a common sight and most of the traffic was composed of trucks and Land Rovers. They soon arrived at El-Golea, the final jumping-off point for the genuine raw desert travel of the Sahara, where camel caravans and the Tuareg people dominate. The Tuareg, sometimes called the 'Blue People' because of their indigo-dyed traditional clothing, are semi-nomadic Muslim people who have controlled several trans-Saharan trade routes for generations.

Because they were going further south, the Stuarts were obliged to check in with the police. The police took their names, checked their provisions, and gave specific instructions on desert travel:

1. In case of a breakdown, don't leave the vehicle.
2. Any vehicle or provisions encountered on the trail south must be left alone since they are probably there for a reason.
3. Make sure to have adequate water at all times.

The police explained that a Land Rover was sent out across the desert every few days and radios ahead to destination points listed on their itinerary. The Stuarts gave them an approximate arrival date at Tamanrasset, their final destination before heading back to Morocco. Many well-intentioned travelers have been lost in the desert and the police made it their job to impress upon them how quickly things could go wrong.

The Stuarts treated themselves to a night in a small hotel in El-Golea which included a bath in warm water, meals in the dining room, and a chance to wash some clothes. Cynthia mentioned to Geoff that she wanted to have a private talk with the boys before bedtime. He merely nodded, kissed her, and went out for a walk.

After Geoff left for his walk, Cynthia sat down with Randy and Brian in their small room. "First, I want to tell you how very proud I am of each of you and how much I love you." Randy and Brian

looked at each other in surprise. "Brian, I'm proud of how hard you've worked on your stutter and reading. I couldn't believe, too, how easily you installed that new battery today! You have a real talent for building and mechanics." Brian blushed and smiled. "And Randy, you have grown into a wonderful young man. You box, you run track, you play drums in your own band.... and your grades have improved so much this last year! I can't tell you how proud and impressed I am with your confidence and the talent you demonstrate in everything you do." The boys started to speak but she put up her hand. "It's all true, but the one thing I want to say..." She hesitated a moment. "I want to ask for your forgiveness."

Randy spoke up then. "Mom, for what? You've been great!" Brian echoed what Randy said.

"Let me finish, please. This is important to me. I realize that I haven't been the mother you two deserve. I yelled at you a lot over the years, I was unreasonably harsh and I neglected you over and over again. When we got to Cambodia, I got so wrapped up in what I wanted, that I... well, I just wasn't around much. I want to apologize and I want to tell you that I've been trying to be not only a better mother but a better person." By this time, she had started to cry.

She looked at her two boys. Randy, a strapping seventeen-year-old who would soon go out on his own, and her Brian, barely fifteen and still in need of a lot of direction.

Both boys knelt in front of her and wrapped their arms around her. "Don't worry Mom," Randy whispered. "We love you and we've already forgotten all that. You're a great mother."

Cynthia leaned back and looked into their faces. "Now then. We've got a challenging road ahead of us the next couple of weeks and Daddy and I are going to need a lot of help from both of you if we're going to make it back home safe and sound. Of course, it will be a lot of fun, too. If we all stick together and help each other, this trip will be the adventure of a lifetime! Are you ready?"

Randy and Brian answered in unison with big smiles. "Ready!"

After everyone was in bed for the night, and all was quiet, Cynthia thought how she was happier and more at peace now than

she'd been since ... since she couldn't remember when. It was wonderful.

QUARANTE-TROIS

"You may not find the path, but you will find a way." Tom Wolfe

XLIII. Grand Erg Occidental. Christmas 1969

While having an early breakfast in the hotel dining room the next morning, the Stuarts met a young German couple, Gerlinda and Peter.

"We need a ride back to our friends," Peter spoke with a strong German accent. "We have been caravanning together and one of our vehicles broke down. Gerlinda and I got a ride here to pick up the parts we need, but now we need to join our friends who are waiting for us. Could you help us?"

Geoff and Cynthia looked at each other and both nodded. It was Christmas Eve, after all, a time of goodwill. So, the Stuarts invited them into their own cramped VW camper and were soon driving south into the Great Sahara Desert.

Loaded to the gills, the explorers drove south. The first 40 miles was easy going on a good macadam road. The next 160 miles was another story. Their speed decreased dramatically as they left the macadam road and headed into an area where there was literally no road to follow. Geoff could see tracks of other vehicles that had gone before them. Sometimes he could see a

truck heading north several hundred yards to the right or left of their path. The vehicles threw up enough dust to announce their arrival in their vicinity, so the chance of collision was not a worry.

They averaged about 30 miles per hour most of the time when the surface was smooth. However, there were times when the surface was rocky, slowing them down to no more than 10 miles per hour. Oil drums or truck tires were placed every few miles over the flat surface. As the camper passed a barrel or tire and it disappeared in the dust behind them, Geoff attempted to keep driving on the same heading until another barrel appeared. Bumping along in this manner, the Stuarts and their German passengers worked their way south.

The Sahara Desert was not exactly what they had expected. Randy and Brian had visions of huge, endless sand piles with Nomads and camels running around with packs on their backs. While part of that vision was true, there was much, much more. Cynthia had brought some books with her, which she consulted as they drove along, sharing information about this fantastic new world. None of them was prepared for the vastness of this incredible land and the variety of the terrain they encountered.

After they left El-Golea they crossed an area called the Grand Erg Occidental. This is an extensive area of sand dunes that extends from Egypt in the east to Morocco in the west, traversing Libya, Tunisia, and Algeria. This was more sand than any of the travelers could begin to imagine stretching into infinity in all directions. Later, they crossed the Plateau de Tademait, a vast, very flat plateau spread out over thousands of square miles in central Algeria. Further south the topography changed again with canyons and weird rock formations. They saw oases on the periphery of the Tademait Plateau where underground water was reached through wells. Along with palm trees and other vegetation, they sometimes saw animals near the oasis, such as the Dorcas Gazelle and the Addax Antelope.

Cynthia pointed them out as they drove by. "Those animals, boys, can exist for long periods with only the moisture found in the vegetation. Isn't that incredible?"

They never saw any clouds. There was no rain. Cynthia told

them that the average annual rainfall would vary from zero to a few inches.

"In rare times of rain, it might evaporate before hitting the ground. You can see the rain coming down in the sky, but it never gets to the ground. That's a lot different from what we saw in Cambodia, isn't it?"

It was all so removed from anything they had ever experienced. It was like an alien world. It could be incredibly beautiful and incredibly terrifying at the same time.

On the edge of the great Tademait Plateau, Geoff stopped at an abandoned fort, the French Foreign Legion 'Miribel', which had been built in 1894 after the French captured El-Golea. Everyone fell out of the camper for some much-needed relief from their bumpy, dusty ride. In front of the fort was a massive stone gateway, where solid wooden gates had once hung. It hadn't been so long ago, the 1920s, that those gates could seal in the legionnaires and protect them from attack. Looking up at the fort walls, they saw crenellations from which soldiers fired their guns down on the attackers.

They walked inside the courtyard and saw that much of the interior rooms were still intact. Although sand had drifted up against the walls and the interior buildings, the visitors could imagine what it had been like when the legionnaires were here.

"Think of it, boys." Geoff pointed out the old defenses. "How many fights, how many battles have been fought from behind these walls?" They nodded their heads in wonder.

Geoff didn't mention that this fort represented a time when French colonialism sought to control the Tuareg people and their trade routes and annex their lands. The French were gone now and the Tuareg people remained.

With thoughts of the brave French Foreign Legion, the travelers climbed back into the van as Geoff shifted into gear for the next leg of their journey.

After what seemed to be hours of the endless desert of sand, gravel, and dust, there appeared in the distance what looked like several parked vehicles. It was so uncommon to see anything at all except the vast expanse of sand and sky, that when a sign of

humanity was encountered, it always came as an unexpected treat. As they drew closer, their German passengers shouted out in excitement. It was their friends, still in the same place they had left a week earlier.

Geoff pulled the VW up alongside the campsite as the young couple quickly jumped out with happy greetings in German. There were three vehicles parked in a semi-circle, much in the same manner as the old American West immigrants circled the wagon trains for protection. Geoff completed the circle with their VW camper. After introductions all around, it was learned that these German travelers were on the first leg of a journey to traverse Africa, north to south.

A major engine problem had stopped them in their tracks in the middle of the Tadimaet Plateau. With their short-wave radio, they had contacted the Volkswagen company headquarters in Stinglefengin, Germany. Instructions were provided as the engine was dismantled to reach the problem. Then the experts in Germany told them what parts were needed to make the repairs. Now with the parts in hand, the Germans went to work.

The Volkswagen looked as if a bomb had gone off inside, flinging engine parts all over the interior. The engine was completely torn apart, with parts scattered all over the floor and the seats. Randy was amazed. "How in the world can anyone put all this mess back together again, let alone make it work?"

Brian was fascinated with the whole project. "I bet I could do it!"

As the men worked, Geoff kept telling Brian to stay out of their way. "I know you would love nothing better than to get in the middle of this and put that engine back together. But these men know what they're doing."

That was Brian. He loved things like that and could spend hours tinkering and fixing things. Randy wanted nothing to do with it. It looked like an incomprehensible mess to him. He couldn't tell one part from another.

As the sun began to sink toward the horizon, everyone put on their warm clothing. It was amazing how quickly that hot desert could turn so cold. Because of the low humidity and lack of cloud

cover, the temperatures varied as much as 70 degrees Fahrenheit from day to night. It wasn't uncommon to experience sub-freezing temperatures at night.

They all sat on auto tires, boxes, and gas cans as the Germans passed around their good German beer to celebrate the Stuart's arrival. Brian and Randy drank their sodas. Most of the Germans spoke reasonable English, so they compared notes on desert travel and what to expect further south. Even though it was getting late, Geoff decided to drive on a bit further. The Germans thanked the Stuarts again and called out "aufiderzein", as the VW drove off into the growing twilight.

As the sun sank over the horizon, the family, once again, was alone in the vast sea of featureless desert. By the time camp was set up and dinner finished, the temperature had plunged to freezing. The evening was beautiful. Geoff and Randy, bundled up in their coats, walked out a little way from camp toward the setting sun.

They stopped and slowly turned in a 360-degree circle. Randy could see the horizon in a straight line from wherever he stood. The quiet was deep and penetrating. It was an awe-inspiring feeling. "It's so flat and vacant here, it's almost as if we can actually see the setting sun slipping over the side of the earth to where it's now rising on the other side."

"That's right!" Geoff said. "This also reminds me of being on the bridge of my ship in the middle of the Pacific Ocean." He paused a moment. "Just look up at the sky, Randy!"

They looked up into the night sky, filled with stars, the Milky Way spread out like a shimmering scarf. Geoff pointed out Venus and other constellations.

Randy remembered how it was Christmas Eve tonight. "Dad, do you think one of those stars could be the Star the Wise Men saw over Bethlehem? Venus is so bright."

"Humm… good question. You never can tell."

Cynthia came out with her camera and asked Randy to walk out away from Geoff for a few yards. She took their picture with Geoff in the foreground and his son in the background, dark nubs on the vast horizon against the sunset's red glow. "That should

be a great picture," Cynthia exclaimed. "If it turns out well, I'll enlarge it and have it framed for the house. It will remind us of how happy we were on our Saharan adventure as well as the incredible beauty of the desert."

Christmas morning dawned and the sun quickly warmed the Stuarts and thawed out their frozen clothes. Cynthia had rinsed out some things before going to bed and spread them out on their little camp table, where they froze stiff. After breakfast, they sang a verse of 'Silent Night' and of course the favorite 'Jingle Bells', which brought laughter when they sang the 'dashing through the snow' part, especially when Randy changed 'snow' to 'sand'. They all laughed some more when the song became gibberish of forgotten words. Then they exchanged a few small gifts around their minuscule tree perched on the tiny kitchen countertop.

After opening up his gift of a brand-new pocketknife, Randy quipped, "Whew, I was worried you'd get me something practical, like a muffler or snow boots."

Never knowing what they may encounter or what the road conditions might be, the family didn't waste time and were soon on their way. If the road was good, they could average 40-50 miles per hour. Then they would hit a rough stretch, restricting them to 5-10 miles an hour. Mile after mile they followed the oil drums or large truck tires marking the route south. Finally, they descended a rocky area off the plateau and into another flat sandy part of the desert.

By noon they reached In-Salah, just north of the mid-point of their journey, Tamanrasset. They had come 850 miles since entering Algeria. Even in December, the temperatures were reaching into the 90s, with overnight lows well below freezing. It was a harsh environment and the Stuarts had been incredibly lucky so far.

Geoff changed the oil and filter and filled the gas tank and water jugs. After checking in with the prefecture, they drove back out into the desert. The track disintegrated as they inched their way from barrel to barrel. The moonscape-like terrain was littered with huge boulders, blown by the sand. They drove all day and into the night on an unidentifiable trail, seeing no other vehicle.

Geoff estimated they had averaged less than 25 mph all day long. After a quick dinner, the family collapsed into an exhausted, deep sleep.

QUARANTE-QUATRE

"Be not forgetful of hospitality; for by it some have unawares entertained angels." Hebrews 13:2

XLIV. Sahara. December 1969

The next day was much the same as the day before, although they saw a couple of trucks heading north, with gerbas, goat skins used for carrying water, slung on the sides.

Finding a place to camp, Geoff stopped the VW at about 8 p.m. and everyone began to set up for the night. Brian and Randy first pitched their tent and pulled out their sleeping bags. Geoff lit a lantern and set up their folding table and camp stove. Cynthia quickly pulled out some canned meat and one of her prepared containers of dry noodles and seasonings to which she added water and canned vegetables to make a noodle-type soup.

It had been another long day and they were tired and hungry. Soon the meal was ready, and Cynthia spooned up portions into bowls and everyone found a place to hunker down to eat. Geoff and Cynthia chatted quietly about the next day and their timetable. They expected to reach Tamanrasset soon. They needed enough time to make the return trip home before the boys had to be back at school and Geoff back at the office.

Randy and Brian finished their dinner and soon crawled into their tent for the night. Geoff decided to turn off the lantern since the full moon provided enough light to clean up before going to bed.

Cynthia went into the camper to make up their beds. Geoff was standing outside washing up their few dishes on the small camp table attached to the side of the VW. They continued their conversation about the trip. Suddenly Geoff felt a tap on his shoulder. A voice behind him mumbled something in Arabic.

Geoff froze, and, afraid to turn around, asked Cynthia, "Did you hear something?" Cynthia, who had been studying the language for over two years, leaned out of the camper and said something in Arabic.

Then, in a low voice, she said in English, "Geoff, there is a man standing behind you." Geoff slowly turned around and looked into the dark eyes peering back at him.

The man's head and face were completely covered with a turban and scarf, with only his eyes exposed. Seeing no weapons and discerning the man's friendly gaze, Geoff began to relax.

"Ask him what he wants," he told Cynthia. Keeping a respectful distance, Cynthia asked questions and responded to his answers. She found out he was going north with his four camels and happened to see their camp. Geoff looked around and didn't see any camels. Was he telling the truth? "Ask him if he will show us his camels."

Hearing the strange conversation, Randy and Brian peered out of their tent and soon trailed behind their parents as the man led them away from the camp. They walked a few yards and around a small hill, they came upon four camels tethered together, patiently waiting for their master's return. Turning to the boys, Geoff cautioned them, "Don't get too close, now. Camels can be unpredictable."

Cynthia learned that he was headed to In-Salah to sell his desert commodities, such as dates, goat skins, and other goods. He said he traveled by night and slept during the day, walking up to 40 kilometers in a 24-hour period. He subsisted on dates, couscous, and goat's milk.

As Cynthia continued talking with the man, Geoff asked the boys, "Why don't you return to camp and bring back some gifts for our guest?" Randy knew what he meant.

They soon returned with hard candy, cigarettes, and some canned soft drinks. These items were kept on hand, as well as some basic medical supplies, for just such occasions. Geoff handed around soft drinks to each one and gave the nomad a few more cans plus the candy and cigarettes. The man was pleased with the gifts and they stood together in a little circle near the camels while they drank their warm sodas, demonstrating respect and goodwill.

Then, gathering his camels and bowing with his hand to his heart, the man disappeared back into the night. As the little camel caravan evaporated into the hills to the north, the family turned to go back to camp.

"What an adventure!" Cynthia exclaimed. "Here we are, hundreds of miles from the nearest town. We've seen only two trucks in the last two days and now we have this surprising visit from a wandering nomad and his camels! Wasn't that fantastic?"

"Thank goodness for your Arabic, Cynthia! I'm not sure how we would have managed otherwise." He turned to Randy and Brian. "See how learning a foreign language is a good thing? You never know what you may have to face when traveling. I'm proud of all of you. You weren't afraid at all. We treated him with respect and kindness and we received his respect in return."

After chatting a little more about their visitor, everyone crawled into their sleeping bags and were carried off to sleep by the haunting music of an Arabic love song, played by their wandering friend on his flute, echoing into the quiet of the desert.

"Amarain…. Amarain doul walla a 'naik,
Albi ibyisaalni a'alaik,
Atareeni bafakkar feek..."
"Two moons … Two moons or are they your eyes?
My heart is asking me about you,
It seems that I am thinking about you…"

QUARANTE-CINQ

"Perseverance is failing 19 times and succeeding the 20th." Julie Andrews

XLV. Tamanrasset. December 1969

Geoff made sure to use the time with the boys productively. Traveling for hours at a stretch with little new to see could be boring, so Geoff used his knowledge of American history to entertain Randy and Brian. It was like a civics lesson. They memorized the names of the Presidential Cabinet Secretaries, state capitols, key dates in American history, and anything else Geoff could think of.

He taught them word association tools that could be used to remember names and dates, and he quizzed them on what they learned. He told them about his World War II and Naval reserve duty experiences. "You know boys, I was not much older than you, Randy, when I was Captain on an LST at the end of the War. It was a wonderful experience, having my own command, directing my ship on its various missions." Randy and Brian exclaimed in awe. Cynthia looked at Geoff with a smile. This version of his war experience was somewhat enhanced from what he'd told her back in Grenoble. "But that's OK," she thought.

The Stuarts were now on the last leg of their journey to Tamanrasset before turning back to Morocco. Things were going well as they entered the Hoggar Mountains. From a flat, sandy, and rocky surface, they began to encounter volcanic outcroppings among the sand drifts. They were now following a sand trail which consisted of stretches of fetch-fetch, a few inches of hard-packed sand over exceptionally fine sand. Having heard about the hazard, Geoff and Cynthia made sure they were prepared with the sand mats they purchased at the beginning of their trip. They knew that if they hit a soft spot in the packed sand, they could lose speed and get stuck. It wasn't long before they put the sand mats to use.

Cynthia was driving the last stretch toward Tamanrasset. Geoff told her that she needed to keep her speed over 20 mph to avoid sinking into the fetch-fetch. She came across some soft areas and the tires began to slip even as Geoff urged her to go faster. Up to now when they hit a depression, she gave the little camper more gas and it pulled out and moved on with no problem. But this time they sank too far too fast and no amount of gas to the accelerator helped. They were stuck.

Cynthia tried rocking the camper back and forth, but Geoff told her to quit since it was just making things worse. Randy expected his mother to get mad about getting stuck, but instead, she calmly gave orders to Brian and him.

"You boys need to unload everything in the camper. We need to lighten the load so we can get out of here."

As the boys climbed out of the camper, Geoff called out, "Randy, pull out those sand mats, first. I'll start letting air out of the tires."

"What? Why let the air out of the tires?" Randy asked. It sounded crazy to him.

"We need more surface of the tire on the ground so we can get the friction we need to get out of this sand." Randy just shook his head in confusion.

After unloading everything they could, Geoff jacked up the rear wheels, one at a time. He then told Brian and Randy to lay on the ground and snake the two 10-foot-long copra fiber mats

under each rear wheel. After the boys got the mats placed, they slid back out and the wheels were jacked down, one at a time. It was a tedious process.

Once everything was in place, Cynthia put the VW in gear and inched the camper a few feet ahead over the sand mats. Sometimes they made good progress and sometimes they didn't. After they'd gone as far as possible on the mats, Geoff jacked up the wheels again and they'd repeat the process, moving the sand mats forward one at a time. It was an arduous, hot, dirty job. It took over two hours before they finally had the VW back on a hard surface.

"Wow, that was tough," Randy commented. "Remember what you told us about deep sand, Dad?"

"Yes, of course, I do," responded Geoff, puzzled as to Randy's meaning.

"I think fetch-fetch takes the prize for making us stronger. We have no choice but to keep working at it, no matter how tired we get. Giving up is not an option."

Cynthia looked just as puzzled and said, "What are you two talking about?"

Geoff smiled at Randy and said, "Oh, nothing. Just a little something the boys and I discussed a long time ago."

The mats were rolled up, and everything was loaded back into the camper. Geoff used his hand air pump to air up the tires before starting back down the road. "I hope we don't have any more of this," Geoff muttered.

Soon road signs began to appear announcing that Tamanrasset was only a few kilometers away. The trail the Stuarts had been following turned into a real road, and after rounding several outcroppings of volcanic hills, an oasis appeared. There were Tamarisk trees, some date palms, and a few houses and other buildings. The main street was even paved.

Tamanrasset, whose population was less than 1,500, was a place of complex ironies, like most of Africa. Here they were, hundreds of miles from the nearest settlement, surrounded by faces, languages, and scenes that few ever encountered in one place. There was a shrine on a nearby mountain marking the spot

where a famous Trappist Monk died defending his service to the indigenous people of Africa. They visited a local clinic operated by French Catholic nuns and watched camels roaming around eating the tops of the Tamarisk trees. Touregs bartered with vendors, dressed in their colorful blue cloaks and turbans which covered all but their eyes.

African slaves were also in evidence. Although slavery had been abolished by the French in the 19th century, Algerian officials continued to turn a blind eye to the hereditary forced labor which was still in practice. Seeing the slaves upset Cynthia. "How can this still be happening in the 20th century?"

"This has been their culture for thousands of years," Geoff replied. "It's not for us to judge."

"Well, I don't care what their culture is. It's just wrong to treat human beings like that." Cynthia's mouth turned down with her disgust while Geoff merely looked at her in wonder. He'd never heard her talk like this.

So far on this journey the Stuarts had seen only a handful of European tourists and encountered no Americans. They were now 1,450 miles due south of Algiers. The nearest oasis, Djanet, was 300 miles northeast toward the Libyan border. The sand trail south led to the border with Niger, some 200 miles away.

Reaching their southern goal, Geoff and Cynthia now prepared for the road home. Fresh water was available, and they refilled their water jugs and stocked up on food supplies from what could be found in the local markets.

On December 29, 1969, the Stuarts retraced their route to In-Salah. The sand mats were brought out again when the fetch-fetch could not be avoided. They stopped briefly at a tiny oasis called Arak about halfway to In-Salah. There were a few miserable huts made of mud with a dozen or so people. All their earthly possessions were clearly in view: three or four baby goats, grinding stones for making meal, some pots and bowls, water jugs and ragged black clothes. These nomadic people, who moved from oasis to oasis, were undoubtedly one step from starvation on any given day. It was a sobering sight for the travelers. Cynthia whispered, "We have so much to be grateful for." Randy, hearing

his mother's comment, nodded his agreement.

After two and a half long days, the Stuarts finally arrived at In-Salah for the second time. Geoff once again changed the oil and filter, refilled their water and gasoline containers, and checked in with the Prefecture, filing a new itinerary. He and Cynthia decided to take a different, hopefully, faster route home, traveling west through Reggane, where they could pick up a good road north back to Morocco.

In the heart of the Algerian Desert, Reggane, along with Adrar to the west and In-Salah to the east, is known as the "Triangle of Fire" because of the extreme heat, where the sun reigns supreme year-round. Traveling in December and January, the Stuarts could expect moderate temperatures, but Geoff fully realized that, compared to a road trip in the USA, they might as well be on the moon. The environment was forbidding, water and fuel were scarce, and fellow travelers were few.

On the last day of 1969, the Stuarts found themselves driving through great piles of wind-blown sand which obliterated the trail for significant stretches. Geoff and Cynthia were constantly looking for signs that they had not strayed off the track. Then, they would bump onto a good surface and be able to make speeds of 50 mph with the periodic oil drums clearly marking the way.

Just when Geoff thought they had it made and were making good time, things suddenly changed when their roadway turned into a long stretch of fetch-fetch. They once again crawled along at 20 mph, holding their breaths that the loaded VW wouldn't suddenly sink into the sand. After going about 50 miles in this way, they encountered a fork in the road, marked by a small oasis where a small group of nomads was camped.

A sign sticking up from the sand indicated two choices, neither of which they could comprehend. "I don't see anything like this on my maps, Geoff," Cynthia said. One of the nomadic men approached their camper and she asked him "Which way to Reggane? Adrar? Morocco?" The man responded with unintelligible sounds. He seemed as puzzled by her questions as she was by his answers.

Geoff was worried. Which way should they go? They could

easily take a road that was not patrolled by roving search vehicles. If they got into trouble, his family could die. He and Cynthia studied the maps, hoping for some revelation or clue. Finally, relying on compass directions, Geoff decided to take the road to the left. Cynthia placed her hand on his arm and said, "I trust you, Geoff. Whichever way you choose I know will be the right path." Geoff looked at her in amazement. She'd never said anything like that to him before.

He quickly squeezed her hand and said, "Well, here we go. Boys, keep a sharp lookout for anything that looks like civilization."

As they bumped along, Geoff and Cynthia were filled with apprehension. For all they knew they may be on the wrong road. Geoff didn't want anyone to be worried, so he put on a confident air and drove on west. They began to see more fetch-fetch and so far, they'd been able to avoid it. But now, here it was, and they were up to the hubcaps in the fine, silty sand.

Geoff silently berated himself that he must have taken the wrong turn. It was late and it would be dark soon. There was no hope they could extricate the VW before nightfall. It was all he could do to keep the worry out of his voice as he reassured the family that everything would be OK, just like before.

"It's too late to bother with this now," he said. "Why don't we set up camp, have dinner and get to bed early for a good night's rest? We'll get an early start in the morning." Cynthia's look told him she realized how bad this could be if they couldn't get out of the sand and if they were, indeed, on the wrong road.

"That sounds like a good plan, dear," she said. "I'll get dinner on while you guys set up camp. Be careful with the water, as always," she cautioned the boys, thinking they might need to start some serious conserving, just in case. Geoff's eyes met hers briefly and he quickly nodded, affirming her thoughts.

The sun disappeared over the endless sand pile and everyone settled into their sleeping bags for the night. Geoff was restless most of the night, and Cynthia realized that he must be worried about the route he'd chosen. She struggled, too, to turn off her anxious brain throughout the deadly quiet of night in the lonely

vast desert.

QUARANTE-SIX

"Difficulties are just things to overcome, after all." Ernest Shackleton

XLVI. Sahara. January 1970

On New Year's Day, 1970, the Stuarts were up with the sun. Randy and Brian soon offloaded the gear from the top of the camper while Geoff let the air out of the tires. Geoff was more subdued than usual as they went about the tasks of jacking up the rear wheels and inserting the sand mats. Fetch-fetch seemed to surround them. He walked around the area to determine which surface might provide a solid footing. Taking his time, Geoff finally decided on an area about 100 yards distant.

Geoff slowly inched the camper to their destination, with Randy and Brian re-setting the sand mats every few feet. As Geoff crept forward, the boys and Cynthia picked up the gas and water cans and other supplies and hand-carried them to keep up with Geoff's slow progress. Finally, the gear was reloaded, and everyone climbed in, hopeful that they would soon be on their way. Geoff decided to leave the tires almost flat until he was sure they were out of danger. What if they hit soft sand again in a few hundred yards?

He gunned the engine and took off, not wanting to slow down even for a second. As they gathered speed, Geoff could at times feel the sand grabbing at the tires again, but he kept going. After 30 minutes of white-knuckle driving, they were on solid ground again. But he still didn't know if they were on the right road. Until he saw signs of civilization, he could not rest easy.

After that last fetch-fetch workout, Brian and Randy were ready for a rest. They were dirty and sweaty, and even Brian said, "I hope we d.d..don't have any more of that stuff." Cynthia knew that Randy and Brian were ready to get back home.

"You guys have worked hard these last few days," she said. "Randy, I bet you can't wait to see your girlfriend," she smiled back at him.

"Well… yeah! I've been gone so long she's probably forgotten what I look like."

"I wouldn't worry, Randy. If she forgets you after a couple of weeks, she's not much of a girlfriend." She laughed at his grin.

After a while of driving, Geoff slowed down again, and everyone was afraid they were about to get stuck again.

Looking out now they saw a large area of brilliant white sand. Geoff stopped the camper a few yards away and they all got out to look. As Randy got closer, the substance looked more like a fine powder than sand. He bent down to feel it and it was light and feathery feeling, like talcum powder. Randy picked up a handful and tossed it up in the air. The wind caught it and blew it apart like a cloud of white cotton. It was almost like blowing the fluff off a dandelion. Brian picked up some of the stuff, too, and tossed it into the air. The two were soon in a 'powder fight', laughing and throwing the substance in each other's direction, trying to dodge out of the way. "You two are no better than little kids!" Cynthia laughed at their playfulness.

After inspecting the area, Geoff decided that they might be able to get across it OK. "There's no way that I can see to get around it," he told Cynthia, "so we may as well give it a try. We have no choice anyway." He turned back to where the boys were playing. He couldn't believe how little it took to amuse them. "Everyone back in the camper!" he called out.

For the next several hundred yards the camper plowed ahead, like a ship parting the waves. The stuff was deep in places, sometimes up to the hubcaps, but much to their delight and amazement, the powder did not grab the tires and they slipped easily through.

Before too long, they made it through to the other side. It occurred to Geoff that the powder might be gypsum, the same kind of gypsum that is found at White Sands in New Mexico. He shared his revelation with everyone. "I bet that's just what that sand was... gypsum! That area in New Mexico was very important during the War. Scientists developed the first nuclear bomb there. We'll have to visit it sometime." Cynthia smiled. Geoff just couldn't resist an opportunity for a history lesson.

After a while they saw a vehicle in the distance, the first they'd seen since turning on this trail. As they approached, it was evident the vehicle was not moving. "Maybe someone's in trouble," Randy said. But as their camper drove even with it, he saw the vehicle must have been abandoned. No one was around anywhere that he could see.

It was a small pickup truck with cans and other provisions loaded in the back. The door was not locked, and it appeared no one had been near it for days. Sand was piled up around the wheels and in the open bed around the various items.

Randy asked, "What is this, Dad? Why is this truck just sitting here?"

"Oh, I think that someone probably left it here for work crews or others traveling this way," Geoff replied. "We should leave it alone." He reminded them of the rules they'd been given in Algeria: "Any vehicle or provisions encountered on the trail south must be left alone." They drove on.

Further on they saw other provisions and water cans by the side of the road. Randy thought of the purpose behind those provisions. "Just think, Mom. Some poor people, out of food and water, could die if those things weren't left on the road like that. That would be terrible, wouldn't it, to be lost in the desert?"

"Yes, Randy, that would be terrible. Sometimes bad things happen to people. We should be grateful that others have left

those supplies to help anyone who needs them. We should also be grateful that your dad has planned our trip so well that we don't have to worry about things like that happening to us."

Geoff quickly turned his head to Cynthia and said, "Come on, Cynthia, you did all the planning." He gave her a big smile. "I just did what you told me to do." Cynthia laughed in response. Randy and Brian, happy to see their parents bantering in fun, joined in their laughter.

Geoff could hardly hide his relief when they came upon that abandoned pickup. For the first time since he'd taken the fork, he thought that maybe they were on the right road. Of course, there was always the possibility that it had been left by some unfortunate lost soul. But that seemed unlikely.

Suddenly, Cynthia grabbed his arm and said, "Look, Geoff! It looks like some buildings are out there." Off to their right they saw some metal structures several feet high with cables extending between them. This meant civilization!

"I think these may be French rocket launching sites that the military used back in the early sixties." Geoff searched his memory. "I remember something about the Algerian War and the French conducting nuclear tests somewhere, too."

Eventually, the Stuarts saw the town of Reggane appear on the horizon. Geoff and Cynthia looked at each other in relief. From that point north, they could travel on a good, surfaced road, their first in over nine days. The whole family was ready for the treacherous sand and uncertainty of each day's travel to end.

Cynthia, as good a traveler as anyone, was done with the constant grit and lack of private facilities. Traveling with three males, two of them her teenage sons, had been a challenge at best. With little vegetation to serve as a screen, Geoff tried to string up a tent-like cubicle for her, but that wasn't always possible. They were all looking forward to getting back home.

Traveling at a good pace, the Stuarts headed for the Moroccan border. By then it was nearly sunset and they, especially Geoff, had experienced a nerve-racking day. There was unanimous consent to stop at Adrar, the next town about 100 miles north of Reggane. By nightfall, they were checked into the only hotel in

town that had real baths and food served by waiters. Not exactly the Ritz, but it was heaven to them.

From Adrar, they drove north entering once again the Grande Erg Occidental. Their next stop was Columb Bechar where they restocked their food supply with oranges, tangerines, butter, and onions. Except for the meals in Adrar, this was their first fresh food since they entered the Sahara at El-Golea. They passed through Figuig, and drove into Morocco, the last leg of their Saharan odyssey.

After a final fourteen-hour run, Geoff parked their faithful VW camper at the door of their house in Rabat, safe and sound. Even with the hardships and uncertainty, everyone agreed it had been the trip of a lifetime. Except for having to replace the battery, the little VW had served them well. But they got home just in time, the cylinders destroyed by the sand.

Cynthia planned this trip for months. She plotted out the route, planned meals, possible campsites, and restocking stops. She researched the Sahara Desert ever since their move to Morocco and even learned Arabic. She knew what the daytime and nighttime temperatures would be. She knew the sites along the way and read up on the people and history. She was prepared. Some would say she was in control, just like the old Cynthia. But there was something different this time.

This time, the family was united in a common goal. She and Geoff looked at the dangers and accepted the challenge of not only traversing the Sahara, but of bringing their family and their marriage together. They talked, they laughed and they worked hard to survive, together. The bonds of trust and love that had frayed, almost beyond repair, were slowly knitting back together. Cynthia hoped in her heart that those bonds would continue to grow stronger.

She believed that the family she almost destroyed was not only healing but stronger than ever. She realized that she and Geoff still had some problems to work through and they may still have rocky times ahead. But after all these years, Cynthia believed it was possible for them to have a healthy, loving marriage. She still had to reign herself in from time to time. She'd been a self-centered,

bossy shrew most of her life, and old habits were hard to turn around.

"I'll have to see if that nice young doctor who helped me with Brian might be willing to help me out with me," she thought. Cynthia sighed and turned her attention back to her husband. He sat in his favorite easy chair, a whisky sour by his side and a book in his hands. She felt content as he looked up at her and smiled.

QUARANTE-SEPT

"Live your life, sing your song. Not full of expectations. Not for the ovations. But for the joy of it." Rasheed Ogunlaru

XLVII. Alexandria, Virginia. April 1981

Geoff was out of the country on a consulting trip for the firm he worked with since retiring from the State Department a few years ago. Cynthia was busy watering her many house plants in their home in Virginia when the phone rang.

"Mom!" Randy's booming voice came through the earpiece.

"Hi, Randy. What's going on with you today?"

"Mom, you know that I've been flying for that little tourist company out here in Vegas?"

"Yes, I remember. Has anything happened?"

After a stint in the Navy and college, Randy played drums with a professional band for a few years, but he gave that up when he decided they weren't going anywhere. He told her about the time he had seen an 'old' drummer while he was sitting at a stop light in downtown Las Vegas. "That guy was hauling his drums out of his car and carrying them into Caesar's Palace. He looked like he was sixty years old at least. I looked at him while I sat there in my car and it hit me. I knew I didn't want to be that guy. So, I quit

the band."

Now he was flying tours into the Grand Canyon, which he loved. He had told her that he was building up time to eventually apply to the airlines. He hoped to get some multi-engine experience in the coming year. Now Cynthia wondered if he'd made another change. Although Geoff grumbled that he still hadn't 'settled down with a real job', she was proud of her son's independent, generous spirit. He was broke most of the time, but he was happy and having a ball doing what he loved.

"No, everything's great. I only wanted to know if you would like to come out here for a few days for a little flying trip, just the two of us!"

"Really?"

"Yeah, the country is incredibly beautiful out here, Mom. I know you'd love it. Some of it reminds me of Morocco. We can rent a little Cessna and fly over the four corners area, then overnight near Monument Valley, have a nice dinner…Would you like that?"

"I absolutely would love it! When would be a good time for you?" They chatted about schedules and decided on a time two weeks later. When Cynthia got off the phone, she immediately called the airport to book a flight to Las Vegas.

Randy planned a two-day trip, flying out of Las Vegas towards the Grand Canyon and then to Monument Valley in northeastern Arizona. "I'll show you where I used to drop off the Colorado River runners and… oh…there's a special place at the edge of the Grand Canyon, Mom, that I've got to show you. It's very remote and very few people get to see that part of the canyon. We'll land at a little dirt strip and then drive up to the edge of this incredible view. The ranger there lets me use his old International Travelall. The overlook is called Tuweep. I try to go there as often as I can. We'll have it all to ourselves."

Cynthia loved Randy's ebullience. It always made her smile. "Great! I'm sure we'll have a terrific time. I can hardly wait to see you, son!"

Randy picked her up at the airport and after dinner took her to a hotel for the night. "My place is too small, Mom or I'd love

to have you stay with me." Cynthia smiled at his perfectly styled haircut, his tight pants and open neck, and form-fitting shirt complete with a couple of gold chains. True to form, he was happy and enthusiastic about everything. He gave her a big hug before he left for his apartment. Randy was a hugger, all right. She stood in the lobby and watched him drive away in his black Camaro. "How did I know he would love it here?" She laughed out loud at the thought.

The next morning, Randy knocked at her door promptly at seven and they went down to the restaurant for some breakfast. "The plane is set for us for 8:30 but I want us both to do the walk around, OK?"

"I'd love to do that! But Randy, you remember I haven't done any flying or anything like that since I was working on getting my instrument rating, just before your father and I left Tunisia."

"I know, it's a shame you were never able to finish that. But hey, it's just like riding a bike, right? You'll love it."

Soon, they were out on the ramp, inspecting the airplane, a Cessna 170. Cynthia took a few pictures and they loaded their small duffle bags and climbed aboard. Cynthia had never flown with Randy before and it had been a long time since she'd been in the cockpit. She was surprised at how nervous she felt.

Randy gave her a headset so she could listen to the tower, and he put his headset on together with his aviator sunglasses. She was impressed, as always, with his confidence and joie de vivre.

As Randy switched on the ignition, the propeller sputtered and the engine roared to life, filling her senses. She leaned forward, scanned the instruments, and listened to the familiar hum of the propeller. The memories came flooding back.

They were cleared for take-off and Cynthia soon felt that incredible thrill that always grabbed her, beginning with her first plane ride, back in 1958. Cynthia put her head back and closed her eyes until she felt the wheels lift off and she looked out the window at the landscape below. She looked over at her son with pride.

He was like her in so many ways, except that he was willing to sacrifice for what he wanted, do without, work hard, scrape

by…whatever it took. No compromising. She understood her mistakes, and she was happy Randy wasn't repeating them.

Randy set their course, checked the instruments, and when they were at cruise, turned to Cynthia with a big smile. "Ready to take the plane?"

"Why not?" She placed her hands on the yoke, set her feet on the rudder pedals, checked her instruments, and then turned her eyes forward toward the horizon.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I enjoyed writing WALKING IN DEEP SAND and hope you enjoyed reading it! I spent many hours researching life in Cambodia, Thailand, and Morocco and found it all fascinating. I especially found it incredibly interesting and fun to learn about the lives of US citizens serving in these places before the tourists discovered them. I spoke to people who had firsthand experience and I am so grateful for their insights.

If you like my book, please leave a review on my Amazon page at https://www.amazon.com/author/vcmwalker.811-950s or on my Facebook page at https://www.facebook.com/vcw397. I look forward to hearing from you!

WALKING IN DEEP SAND is V.C. Williams' first novel. She is a second-generation Arizonan and makes her home there.

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WALKING IN DEEP SAND

A Novel Inspired by True Events

On the verge of utter failure due to her immature expectations, Cynthia Jones, a determined but selfish young woman, marries a WWII Navy veteran with the assumption that his career as a US Foreign Service Officer will help her achieve her dream of adventure and independence.

But when she partners with an exciting French aviator with a mysterious past, she is unable to control the consequences of a life of self-absorbed deceit and risks losing not only her marriage and young sons, but her life. She has two choices, the easy road or the most difficult path of her life. Which will she choose?

V.C. Williams is a native Arizonan who loves to travel and learn about people and cultures. WALKING IN DEEP SAND is her first novel.

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